

FIRE AND FROST
BY MARY CROFTWELL

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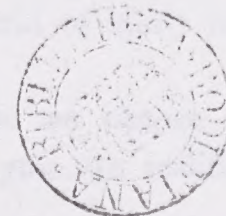
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FIRE AND FROST

CHAPTER I

PART I

PART I



FIRE AND FROST

CHAPTER I

BUT, Clare! It's the life of the past, not of the present."

"So much the better! Modern life is nothing but a series of rushes from one emotion to another, a headlong race till you drop dead from fatigue—a race with no goal and no prize!"

"Certainly Paris is tiring—I can't deny that. But then it's Life—with a big L!"

"That depends on how you define Life."

"Oh, I know what Life is! It's crowding the most pleasure into the least time and extracting all the sensations one can!"

"Yes! Extract is a good word. It implies so much trouble and mechanism? And when you've extracted your sensation with infinite pains you don't enjoy it. One needs leisure to enjoy, and what leisure do you get in the rush and whirl of Paris?"



FIRE AND FROST

CHAPTER I

“BUT, Clara! It’s the life of the past
and of the present.”
“So much the better! I believe
it is nothing but a series of mistakes
from one generation to another, a bad thing
you don’t want from father—a man with no soul
and no sense!”
“Certainly that is wrong—I can’t deny that
but that is life—with a big L!”
“That depends on how you define life.”
“Oh, I know what life is! It’s something
that comes into the world and something
of the momentous one is!”
“Yes! That is a good word. It implies
all such things and meanings! And when
you’ve reached your position with family and
you don’t enjoy it. You want to enjoy,
and what better do you get in the end and what
is there?”

"Oh, I don't know! One sits down sometimes. I do a lot of thinking while my maid's doing my hair."

"Sibyl! What sort of thinking is that! It tires one only to think of your life—standing for hours to be fitted for clothes you only wear twice, whirling from house to house just to be seen—spending half the day being dressed and redressed—and going to bed so worn out that you sleep like a log and wake with a headache, only to begin the same rush over again! A terrassier would shrink from such labour and long hours! At least he gets his wages and has his evenings to himself! But you get nothing—nothing—except a headache! And the worst of it is, it's like a drug. In time you can't do without the rush. I bet you find my Florence horribly dull already!"

"Oh, I wouldn't bury myself here *for the world!*" (with fervour).

"There you are—bury! You call your senseless rush—your elaborate processes for killing time—living, and my serene enjoyment of life, death! And yet, if such a thing as a vitality-metre existed, I know whose record would be highest—yours or mine."

"But, Clare, yours is a life of the brain not

of the body. You live in a world of ideals not of reality!"

"Reality, *ma chère*, is what we choose to make it. What are ideals to you are realities to me."

"Oh, of course, if you prefer to be idle——"

"But I don't call myself idle! My body is as active as yours, my brain much more so! Only I don't fritter my energies uselessly."

The scene of the above discussion was the Tribuna of the Uffizi, that charming octagonal temple presided over by the dainty meretricious Venus beneath her oyster-shell canopy. She whom her companion called Clare was a young woman of about twenty-eight, built on the lines of a Greek ephèbe, tall and straight, with blue eyes that looked you full in the face, and a fair skin slightly tanned with exposure to the Italian sun. She certainly did not give the impression of an idler through life, but then neither did her companion. Both were energetic, healthy young women, clad in tailor-made serge of faultless cut, with just the half imperceptible differences that distinguish the dwellers in city and country. No climbing and only a limited amount of walking could be done by legs cramped within the narrow confines of Sibyl's skirt and perched on heels five



inches high. Slender almost to thinness, her lips artistically touched with red, her chestnut hair, parted on one side and scientifically waved, she looked somewhat out of place among the German tourists in their woollen suits and clumsy boots and the English in their blouses and waterproofs. Sibyl Antonini, née Potter, was an American beauty of commercial antecedents whose dollars had won her the hand, if not the heart, of an impoverished Italian Prince of prehistoric race. Three months of married life were enough to show both of them their total incompatibility of temper and temperament, for Sibyl adored Paris and abominated Rome, while Dario Antonini was devoted to his country, to his gloomy palace and his sunny villa, to redeem which he had sold his freedom. As they were both reasonable beings they determined to make the best of things, and as soon as they were thoroughly convinced that they could not be happy together, decided to be happy apart. Sibyl was generous and he was modern-minded, and while the Roman palace and Frascati villa profited by the Potter dollars, she on her side gained social status in Paris by the great name they had bought. It was give and take, and neither felt any false shame, and they paid each other little flying visits which kept

them right in the eyes of the world and of each other. She was on her way back to Paris now from one of these periodical visits and had broken the journey to spend a few days with her friend Clare whom she had not seen for a year.

Sibyl Potter and Clare Glynne had been schoolfellows together in Paris, whither they had been sent from their respective countries to finish (or begin) their education. Clare was English, of good birth and blessed with plenty of money. Her parents had both died before she left school and she had grown up with a brother and two sisters much older than herself in the family mansion in Portland Place. When she was twenty her sisters had married, and to her great annoyance the charge of keeping her brother's house had devolved upon herself. He was in Parliament and too preoccupied with politics to have time to search for a wife, so she set to work herself, for household and social cares were not at all to her taste, and she longed to be free to lead her life her own way. She had no lack of suitors, for she was good-looking and had a great attraction for men by reason of her wealth, health, and beauty—the three requisites in the satisfactory wife, but she had a horror of marriage, considering it a fetter which chains the body, hampers the



mind, and necessitates complete sacrifice of the personality on one side or the other. She adored art, and her adolescence was a kind of spiritual orgy, during which her soul rioted impartially in the music of Wagner, of Bach, and of Beethoven, in the painting of the Italian Renaissance and the modern Impressionist, in the sculpture of ancient Greece, of Michelangelo and Rodin. Everything that was great pleased her and she darted like a dragon-fly from one to the other unable to fix her insatiable mind. She wanted to know everything, see everything, feel everything, that was famous in Nature and Art. As a schoolgirl she had built her Spanish castles on Parnassus, and her one desire was to be free to devote her life to the Muses.

As long as her sisters were unmarried she had been able to shut herself up in her room and study as much as she pleased, and had even managed to travel a little, first under the chaperonage of the old family governess, and afterwards with her great friends the Maryxs. But since their marriage she had been terribly tied. Her dream was to be absolutely free, unchaperoned, and unencumbered, to bid farewell to the fogs and conventionalities of English life, to wander freely where the spirit moved her,

to linger bee-like on every flower in her path, and to have a pied-à-terre in sunny Italy where she could deposit the honey she had gathered. So she set to work to find a wife for her brother, and invited all her friends one after the other on trial to the house. But one after the other drifted out of it unbetrothed, for Sir John took little interest in love, and his temperamental coldness towards women had been turned to positive aversion since the fatal day when his coat had been torn and his hat battered out of all shape by a crowd of militant suffragettes. It was many months before that episode was effaced from his mind, but in the end it served Clare's purpose, for her next candidate, duly prompted, won his interest by her sweet docility and submissive acceptance of the inferior place assigned her by Providence, gained his respect by cooing out her antipathy to the Pankhurst propaganda, and succeeded finally in eliciting a vague declaration which was pounced upon by Clare and solidified into a formal proposal.

Her brother, hardly realizing the situation, offered only a faint remonstrance when the news of his engagement was broken to him. Clare hastened on the wedding with almost unconventional speed, fearful lest he should change his



mind, and shortly after the ceremony announced her intention of spending a year in travel with her friends the Maryx as a preliminary canter to an independent career.

The House was sitting, and Sir John, too busy to pay much attention even to his own change of circumstances, made a mild objection and speedily dismissed the subject from his mind, but her sisters were horrified and disgusted. They had no hold over her, for she was twenty-five, and their father—just man!—had left to each of them an independent fortune, but they did their best to convince her of the social enormity she was committing. "It will be a scandal if she goes about travelling like that and takes a house all by herself!" they chorused desperately to their brother. "You *must* prevent it! She is mad!"

But Sir John only shrugged his State-burdened shoulders. "What can I do?" he said, helplessly. "Clare is stronger than I! She must go her own way. She will soon tire of solitude and take a husband."

Her sisters and friends knew better. Clare had strongly developed views on most subjects, but on none so much as on marriage. "If I were poor I might marry," she said in answer to

their outcries. "Poverty is almost as enslaving as marriage and more sordid. But since I am lucky enough to have money I should be a fool to put myself in fetters!" So she packed up her books and bibelôts, said good-bye to her relations and special friends, and embarked soon after her brother's marriage, with her maid Irma and her Pekingese spaniel Claudine, for a trip round the world with the Maryx. "I will marry," she said to her sisters, who accompanied her to the boat and were utilizing the last moments in vehement protests and counsels, "I will marry when I get sick of my own self, not before! Life is much too interesting to settle down in a narrow groove, with social and domestic boredom and a nursery in prospective. I am too busy to marry."

And she began to live her own life.

At the commencement it consisted of a prolonged voyage, during which she studied art and nature, men and things, in the four quarters of the globe. But after twelve months' Wanderjahr she felt her mind becoming too stuffed with good things and decided to settle down for a bit and digest them. So she took an apartment in an old Roman palace, and, having just come back from Greece, took up the study of the antique



with fervour. "I like Greek art," she explained, "because it is the expression of the one epoch in which Beauty reigned supreme, and interprets it spontaneously and simply. Italian art is tarnished with false aspirations and enfeebled by self-distrust. It is the difference between Botticelli's Venus of the Sea and the Victory of Samothrace. One is free-souled and magnificently strong, the other timid and apprehensive."

She passed several months in Rome and Naples, following the excavations with keen interest, and was beginning to be known as an archæologist of remarkable flair. But after a time the serenity of Greek gods and the complacent arrogance of Roman emperors palled upon her, and she began to yearn for the child-like pathos of Botticelli, the flashing energy of Leonardo, and the strenuous effort of Mantegna. "How capricious!" said her friends. But they were wrong. It was not caprice, but the healthy development of a strong personality seeking a suitable outlet.

In any case, what they said did not matter, for she had her answer ready in the famous words of Walt Whitman, "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then, I contradict myself," and went her own way. She gave up her apart-

ment in Rome and took a villa on the slopes of Fiesole, intending to make it her headquarters for a series of explorations in the highways and byways of central Italy. She had been living there six months and was rapturously happy in the beauty of the place, the vicinity of her chosen friends the Maryx, and the absorbing interest of her studies, when her Valhalla solitude was temporarily disturbed by the visit of Sibyl Antonini.

"Clare!" said Sibyl, as they drove back from the Uffizi in the comfortable limousine, "don't you get tired sometimes of living in dreamland and want practical things—a husband, for instance? I know Dario isn't much of a husband, but it's nice to know he's there—a sort of moral background to lean upon, you know." Sibyl was apt to get mixed in her metaphors.

"No, my dear, I can't say I want a husband—even one as convenient as Dario. I'm not brave enough to undertake the responsibility of marriage, and I value my liberty too much to risk losing it. I'm very happy as I am and too egoistic to submit to the eternal self-suppression and self-sacrifice which is the fate of most wives except your lucky self. If I had no life of my own, no will and no interests—only needed a



guide and a buffer between me and the world like most women, or a background, as you picturesquely say, to lean upon—I might perhaps marry, or if I found some one with exactly the same temperament and ideals as myself. But that is impossible, since he would have to be a man and I'm a woman, and there is nothing in the world so dissimilar as a man and a woman. And even if it were possible it would only be like some uncanny dream of 'How they met themselves,' foretelling my intellectual death."

"I think," said Sibyl, taking a cigarette from the gold case in her jacket pocket and lighting it, "I think it shows wonderful courage to live alone."

"I think it shows wonderful courage—or thoughtlessness, or ignorance—for two people who hardly know each other to swear eternal love and faith! There should be a novitiate before marriage as before taking the veil, six months' trial at least—only I don't think there would be many marriages after."

"They are beginning to do it in America," said Sibyl, meditatively puffing her cigarette. "Quite chic girls, too."

"They do well!" said her friend, watching the smoke float in a myriad blue wreaths out

of the window. "You see, when men marry they go on living their own lives more or less as before, but women are expected to adapt themselves to their husbands and be submissive and effaced. You are an exception, but then Dario is unique among husbands for letting you go your own way."

"And you never feel dull or lonely?"

"Never! That I can say with absolute truth. How can one be dull with all the inexhaustible treasures of Art and Nature to draw upon, or lonely with all the giants of the past for friends! Life is not long enough, nor the energies strong enough to explore even an infinitesimal bit of this wonderful world. Every moment I cry, like Faust, 'Verweile doch! Du bist so schön!'"

"Well, it's more than I can say," avowed Sibyl, honestly. "I get horribly bored often—always when I'm by myself and generally when I'm with people, and I'm never sorry when the day comes to an end."

"That's because people for the most part are not stimulating," remarked Clare, "and the mind, like every other motor force, needs perpetual stoking. Try art and books."

"Without men?—Zut!" said her friend, with conviction, puffing her cigarette.



The limousine had rounded the curves of the hill by the Convent of Fra Angelico and the arched colonnades of the villa came in sight. It was one of the most beautiful of the Fiesole villas, but had been bought by Clare for a sum of money which seems ridiculously small now that the fame of Florence as a tourist city has increased its rents and spoiled its charm. She had named it after the Ferrara Palace, La Schifanoia—Sans Souci—and had rigidly respected its antiquity, leaving intact the discoloured moss-covered stones without and the great carved mantelpieces and painted beams within. She had added a few indispensable modern comforts, electric light, telephone, and central heating, but had had the apparatus disposed with such discretion that the anachronism was not obtrusive. The light shone from old wrought-iron lamps and gold and vermilion Venice lanterns, the heating-pipes were not visible, and in winter huge logs of aromatic pine crackled and blazed in the open hearths.

On one side of the building was a thick grove of cypress and ilex, straggling irregularly up the side of the cliff, and filled with little runnels of limpid water. This bosco was the glory of the place and Clare's chief joy. It was like a miniature rock of La Verna, and every now and then

one came on a crumbling chapel, through the paneless windows of which broken Madonnas and Saints loomed indistinctly, half hidden in a tangle of briar and fern. Here the paths were always cool as a grotto even in summer, the leaves thick, and the water fresh and abundant, and she was never tired of wandering under the dark foliage, drinking in deep draughts of the good air, with the ripple of the water and the song of the birds for music. And the birds sang their loudest in her bosco, for they knew they were safe from the too ready gun of the contadino, protected by the menacing BANDITA GLYNNE, with which she had surrounded her property.

As the automobile stopped before the great stone archway of the villa the butler came forward and handed a telegram to the Princess. "From my mother!" she exclaimed as she opened it. "It's been forwarded from Rome. I wonder what she's wiring about!"

"Sapristi!" was her next exclamation, "I do believe I'll have to go back to Rome! Clare, listen! Did you ever hear anything so boring! My mother wires that she's left Constantinople and arrives in Naples to-night. And par dessus le marché, she's bringing with her a young Egyptian, whom she describes as a charming



child, and wants to spend a week at Frascati! Dio mio! Quelle scie! Dario has gone down to Sicily and the house and villa are both shut up! What a mother to have! Now, please, what am I to do?"

And she paused on the threshold looking tragically at Clare with her luminous brown eyes.

"Tell her to come here instead!" proposed Clare, as a solution of the difficulty.

Sibyl's brow cleared and her tragic gaze softened to gratitude. "Oh, you darling!" she exclaimed with effusion. "It would have been awful to go back to that dull Frascati! But won't it bore you? There's the charming child too, remember!"

"The house is big enough, and you know how fond I am of Mrs. Potter, and the Egyptian child will be amusing. Is it a boy or a girl?"

"The name is Loutfi Sabaheddine," said Sibyl, referring to the lengthy telegram. "That sounds like a boy, doesn't it?"

"Hum-m-m. I think so," assented Clare, a little doubtfully.

"Oh, you may be sure it's a boy and not a child at all!" said Sibyl. "It's mamma's latest béguin! She's always picking up pretty boys and mothering them. Eccentric old lady! It's

lucky she's got no reputation to lose, for she never goes anywhere without one at least in her train. I must wire at once to Naples, for she'll be rushing off to Frascati without waiting for an answer."

"I thought she was safe in her yali till June," she went on, sitting down at the hall table to write her telegram. "She only settled in last month, but that's quite time enough for her to get sick of it. She's the most vagabond woman in the world—just like an aeroplane whizzing about with no object except to cover space. My grandmother must have been born in a caravan."

"Well, I'm delighted, anyway," said Clare, sincerely, for like every one else she adored the vagabond Mrs. Potter. "And it will be amusing to have the Egyptian with the pretty name. I met two or three of the Princesses when I was in Cairo and they were charming—splendid linguists and real beauties! But make haste with your telegram and let us go to lunch. I'm ravenous, and besides it's two o'clock, and the Maryx are coming at half-past to look at those pictures I bought in Siena."

"Oh!" said Sibyl, in a depressed voice. "How dull! I think I'll take a novel of



D'Annunzio and sit in my room. You are all so assomants when you get on art subjects."

"Don't be afraid. I've telephoned to Chetwynd to come and amuse you," said Clare, laughing. "See what a thoughtful hostess you have! You can flirt in the bosco while we talk art in the study. Now come and eat macaroni!"

CHAPTER II

CLARE had furnished her home with serene contempt for unity of style, holding that everything that is beautiful harmonizes and may be placed in juxtaposition, and curiosities from every country, the spoils of her travels, found a place in her rooms. The Florentine purists called it a jumble and a *salade russe*, and said it set their teeth on edge to see Indian Buddhas cheek by jowl with Sienese Madonnas, and mosque lamps with Venice lanterns. But she let them grumble and advise. "I know what I like," she said, "and I don't care a hang about dates! What's the use of the riches of the past if one limits oneself to one country and epoch? One might as well read only books of one language and date."

She loved green in all its shades, from the vivid tint of the young corn to the rich depths of the dark cypress, and green was the prevailing colour in her rooms. The floors were all carpeted with thick moss-green velvet, and the chairs and



divans were covered with splendid old brocades, glinting with gold thread, and mellowed by time into exquisite vague hues of turquoise, jade, and aqua-marine, and flecked with gold and yellow like the breast of a peacock.

Her own study was the most fascinating of rooms. She had chosen it for its thick walls which no sound could penetrate, for its lofty coffered roof glinting with gold and faded colour, and, above all, for its superb view of the Arno valley, where the river lay in flat coils, like a silver snake on a pond of green duckweed. The windows commanding this enchanting view were rather high from the ground and she had had half the floor raised on a kind of dais to which one ascended by a flight of shallow steps. On this platform, protected by a gilded balustrade, stood her writing table, a magnificent piece of Italian sixteenth-century work, and there, seated in her high-backed chair of crimson velvet, dressed in the red silk kimono she usually wore in the morning, and with Claudine, her Pekingese, lion-like at her feet, she looked like a very luxurious and youthful Saint Jerome. Here she spent the happiest part of her day—her hours of study—and here, when she was tired of work, she would throw herself into one of the comfortable arm-

chairs near the window and smoke blonde Turkish cigarettes while she watched the ever-changing atmospheric effects play over the wide expanse of the valley below. This was the life which her friend Sibyl called idle, with as much comprehension as Darwin's cook who bewailed that her master wasted so much time in watching insects.

In the dining-room the prevailing note was green also, but warmed by the glow of crimson silk curtains and the gleam of shining brass. It had been the old refectory of the monastery, and the wall at one end still bore traces of a frescoed Last Supper, which was said to be by Sodoma. The pulpit from which the brother read the Bible during meals was still in its place, and the ecclesiastical illusion was heightened by the Altarpieces, with which the walls were decorated, and the long, narrow refectory table with solid carved legs, which served as the dining-table. At this board the two friends were seated, eating the first course of their luncheon which consisted of macaroni.

"It would taste so much better if one could only eat it like the Italians," Sibyl was lamenting. "There was a man in the restaurant-car the other day who wound his whole plateful in one long rope into himself without a break. I can't manage



it a bit. Look, Clare, it *will* slip off the fork as fast as I twist it."

"Sibyl! you've wasted a quarter of an hour playing with that stuff," said her friend, "and I hear the bugle of the Maryx' auto. Ask the Signora if she will mind coming in here," she added to the butler as the bell rang.

"I'm afraid we're too early!" said the genial voice of Josephine Maryx, as she entered the room, followed by her husband and Chetwynd, who had come over with them in their limousine.

"Not a bit! It's Sibyl who's been playing the fool and made us late," replied Clare. "But we've almost finished. Sit down and have some coffee. Chetwynd too! How glad I am you've all come together."

"I too!" said Sibyl, "for now I shall be able to have some reasonable conversation while you are poring over your dull old pictures."

They were all old comrades, and, in spite of their different characters, congenial spirits.

Ferdinand Maryx, traveller and archæologist, was Hungarian by birth, but he had passed most of his youth in London and Paris. He was a nomad by nature, and his Florence home was filled like a museum with the rare and heterogeneous objects he had collected in his travels.

He was one of Clare's oldest friends, and as a boy had been a welcome guest at her father's house. He had encouraged and helped her in her art studies, and he and his wife Josephine had been her companions in most of her travels. It was chiefly the attraction of their vicinity that had influenced her in choosing Florence as a pied-à-terre.

They had bought a half-ruined castle at the top of an isolated mountain overhanging Fiesole, and had restored it with infinite respect for its crumbling and picturesque exterior, and to this eagle's nest he and his wife returned after each of their Sindbad voyages as to a haven of rest, to digest the wonders they had seen and deposit their treasures. During these interludes in their nomadic life their guest-chambers were always filled with friends of similar tastes, and the days passed deliciously in a kind of Decameron existence, "conversing of pleasant things," and as far removed from the rush of modern life as Clare's own. Like her, they adored the Florence of the past—the Florence of Dante, Botticelli, and the Medici—and abhorred the Florence of the modern tourist, of the Cascine, the Viali, and the Anglo-American colony.

Ferdinand Maryx was a small man, delicately



built as a girl. He looked like a cross between Don Quixote and an Assyrian bull with his dark, flashing eyes, above which the eyebrows nearly met, his hooked nose, black moustache, and pointed beard. His wife was short, and rather fat. She was always beaming with good nature, and had never been seen out of temper in her life.

Ferdinand was fond of Sibyl, for though she was too tapageuse and frivolous to accord entirely with his ideals, she was such a thing of beauty in herself that she satisfied completely his æsthetic requirements, while the worldly and whimsical spirit she brought into the conversation served as a corrective, and prevented it from getting pedantic. She was by no means without brains, but she frittered them on dressmakers and modistes, and worked too hard at the perfection of her body to have time to attend to her mind.

When they had finished luncheon they went into the study. Clare produced the pictures which she had found in an old Sacristy in Siena, and Ferdinand and Josephine proceeded to examine them with absorbed interest.

"Now they're off on their hobby!" said Sibyl to Chetwynd, lighting her cigarette at the match he held her. "Really, one would think there was nothing in Florence except pictures.

It's like that poem of Tennyson where the man lived alone in a Palace of Art, and went mad. I know I should go mad if I lived here! And you all take it so seriously, too, as if nothing existed except dirty panels smeared with colour. Look at them gesticulating over that absurd Madonna with hardly a bit of paint left on her? Do you know, Clare quarrelled with me this morning because I dared to call Titian's Venus—the one with the femme-de-chambre and the griffon—so modern and natural she is—beautiful. I asked her what I might call beautiful, and she answered, 'the Victory of Samothrace and the Sculptures of the Olympian pediment.' They all say the same thing. It's a shibboleth. Now listen!—Maryx!"

Ferdinand, who was examining the panel through a magnifying glass, turned with a questioning air, obviously a little irritated at the interruption.

"Ferdinand—please, just one moment! Chetwynd and I are disputing and we want your help. He claims that the Titian's Venus—the one with the griffon in the Tribuna—is the most beautiful work of art he knows!"

("I didn't!" protested Chetwynd in parenthesis.)



"Never mind!" in a low voice to Chetwynd. Then to Ferdinand, "I tell him he's wrong to apply that word to her. He is, isn't he?"

"Certainly!" said Ferdinand, caught in the trap. "The language is rich and he can find a more suitable adjective. Call her pretty, if you like, graceful, charming—but reserve the word beautiful for nobler things than that coquettish courtesan."

"That's just what I told him! But tell us—what may he call beautiful—the Venus of Medici?"

"Hardly!"

"Well, what then?"

"The Victory of Samothrace and the Sculptures of the Olympian pediment," he answered glibly, as he turned again to his picture.

"There, Chetwynd! What did I tell you! You see, it's nothing but a shibboleth!"

"Still, he's right—about the Victory anyway," said Chetwynd, a little shocked at her flippancy. "I shall never forget my sensation when I first saw her. I was a youngster of ten paying my first visit to the Louvre, and I had been thrilling for days at the thought that at last I was going to see the Venus of Melos, the goddess of my dreams. And as I walked along the gallery to

find her I looked up and saw the Nike. She literally took my breath away, and I forgot all about the Venus and ran up the stairs and almost knelt at her feet. Even now I have the same reverent impulse every time I see her. I would give a year of my life to see her as she stood on the headland of the Greek Isle, with the deep blue of the sky behind her and the deep blue of the sea at her feet!"

"How sublime!" mocked Sibyl. "Now I, being a mere mortal, never see her without thinking of the pioupiou who said to his comrade, 'Une Victoire—ça! Ben—mon vieux! Qu'est-ce que ça serait si ça avait été une Défaite!' Come, let's go out. It's wicked to stay indoors on such a splendid day."

"I've told them we'll have tea in the Belvedere," said Clare, overhearing, and turning from her Madonna.

"All right! We'll take a run in the bosco and join you there. Come Chetwynd!"

Robert Chetwynd was a great favourite wherever he went. He had the kindest heart, the most poetic mind, and the laziest body imaginable. Endowed with really good faculties, he was such an incorrigible flaneur that he had left Oxford without taking his degree, and had



sauntered through life without ever having achieved anything, even the composition of a poem. The only things he took any pains about were the care of his own dainty person, and the acquisition of gems and cameos. These he chose for their beauty of colour, their mysterious reflections, and poetic associations, rather than for their mercantile value. Diamonds he detested for their hard glitter, rubies he liked only in cabuchon, and his turquoises would not have fetched much in the Rue de la Paix, since he admitted only those coloured like old Egyptian pottery and blackbird's eggs. His favourite stones were opals, and being a bit of a mystic, he was never tired of searching their inward flame, seeing in them all kinds of fantastic dream-pictures like the readers in crystal balls. He adored the translucent green of jade, and the crocus and daffodil shades of amber, and was never without some precious pebble in his pocket, over whose polished surface he would pass his delicate fingers and brood for hours.

Chetwynd did not live in Florence, but he spent a good deal of the year there, and, too lazy to take an apartment or a villa, had furnished a couple of rooms at the Grand Hotel. In Paris he had a charming garçonnière in the Avenue Hoche, but he never stayed there very long at

a time, finding it too noisy and restless for his languorous soul.

He looked at Sibyl with appreciative eyes. It was always a joy to him to see her flower-like face and breathe the delicious perfumes for which she was celebrated. He loathed robustness, and even Clare fell under his ban as being too obviously healthy and strong. Sibyl, with her Parisian *maigreur*, her artificial bloom, her painted lips, and carefully waved hair, was much more to his taste.

"What a joy to see you!" he murmured now in his low, gentle voice as she led the way to the garden. "I missed you in Paris last week when I called at your hotel. Are you going to be here long?"

"For about a week more, I suppose," she replied, turning seductive brown eyes to his.

"I am glad," he said. "For I have some exquisite gems to show you. One—an emerald, blue-green like deep sea-water, engraved with the head of the youthful Nero, and another—an onyx, carved with a girl's head—pure Greek—with boy's hair, like the Fanciulla of Anzio. When will you come and see them? I would like to show them to you quite alone, if you will."

"Cher, you remind me of Herod tempting



Salome! 'J'ai des topazes jaunes comme les yeux des tigres, et des topazes roses comme les yeux des pigeons, et des topazes vertes comme les yeux des chats!' But I need no temptation to come to your charming rooms. Let us say to-morrow at teatime, and you shall read my future in your crystal globe."

"Ah!" he said, sighing. "The last time I read there I saw nothing but horrors—blood—blood—and sinuous serpents and something that flickered and quivered like a soul in pain——"

Sibyl liked Chetwynd's poetry because his amorous eyes gave it a personal application, and they continued their walk conversing in the same strain till a sudden thought of tea drove her towards the Belvedere.

It was the end of April, that loveliest of months in the City of Flowers, when the tramontana has roared itself hoarse and the sun begins to draw out the perfume of lilacs and lilies. The Belvedere was at the extreme end of the garden near the bosco, and was sheltered from the sun by a pergola of vines and roses, and from indiscreet intrusion by a high hedge of clipped box. Besides its natural decoration of roses it was furnished with a marble table carved with crisp-edged acanthus leaves worthy of Verrocchio, and many

comfortable wicker chairs, and in these when they arrived Clare and the Maryx were already lounging, drinking Russian tea and smoking Turkish cigarettes. The arbour was so thickly roofed with vines and creepers that the heat of the sun's rays could not penetrate, but the crimson glow of its decline was visible through a large cutting in the box hedge which framed a marvellous view over the Arno valley.

"So Mrs. Potter is arriving to-morrow?" said Ferdinand as they entered. "How delightful! She's the most stimulating person I know."

"Too stimulating for a mother!" replied her daughter. "She keeps my nerves in a state of perpetual tension. I'm always expecting her to alight on the roof from an aeroplane or dash her automobile through the dining-room windows. There's no peace with her! She's like a cyclone!"

Her voice was drowned in a tumult of approaching noise, and she was just starting to her feet thinking it could be nothing less than Mrs. Potter herself, when a tall girl with flashing eyes and masculine allures strode down the little path between the tall box hedges, followed by three young men, all talking at the same time and



laughing boisterously. Her advent was hailed with enthusiasm by Chetwynd and Josephine, but Ferdinand and Clare looked a little bored.

"So this is where you've hidden yourselves!" said the girl, in English, but with a strong Italian accent. "Guido and I have been looking for you everywhere. They said you were out, but I didn't believe it, because Giuseppe looked so guilty. They say we Italians are all liars, but he's a living proof to the contrary. But I don't believe any one could take *me* in! Guido, give me a cigarette quick, and don't look so moon-struck!" And she flung herself into a rocking chair, and threw one leg over the other with energy, exposing as she did so a fair amount of dainty leg, clad in a stocking so fine as to be almost invisible.

Sibyl put up her face-à-main and looked at her, first with curiosity, afterwards with strong disapproval. Not that she minded noise and exposure of silk stockings. She was guilty of both herself. But there was something too exuberant about the girl—something that verged on provinciality, and Sibyl detested that. She considered that if by misfortune one had not the habits of cities, it was more seemly to be timid and retiring.

"Sibyl, I don't think you've met Donna Elena Davanti," said Clare, presenting the newcomer and her attendant cavaliers.

Sibyl gave a slight bow, to which the girl responded by a half defiant nod, and then turned quickly to the boy she called Guido, and busied herself lighting a cigarette from the match he held for her.

"Carlo couldn't come!" she went on presently in her loud, high voice. "Poor fellow, he was furious! An old uncle, from whom he has expectations, came just as we were starting, and he had to stay behind and talk politics." Clare murmured a few words of conventional regret, and Donna Elena, without waiting to listen to them, turned to her escort of youths and began to chaff them noisily in a jargon of French, Italian, and English.

"What an insufferable girl!" said Sibyl, under cover of the noise, in a low voice to Chetwynd. "Who is she?"

"Oh, she's not half bad when you get to know her," he murmured back. "She's too robust of course, but very good company—really exhilarating at times. She's the daughter of the Marchese Davanti, who used to be Chamberlain to the Grand Duke of Tuscany."



"But that sounds prehistoric, and she looks quite young!"

"He married at sixty, had twins and died when they were babies," he answered; while the girl screamed with laughter as Guido awkwardly upset a cup of tea he was bringing her.

"That comes of your imbecility in giving me tea," she exclaimed; "you ought to know by this time that I never touch that stuff! Give me some vermouth and soda, and try not to spill it this time! You've spoilt Miss Glynne's Poiret tailleur!"

The boy blushed to the roots of his fair hair and went to obey her order. It was evident that he was madly in love and oblivious to everything except the presence of his tormentress. Clare, after a few consolatory words, turned to Ferdinand and resumed the conversation which had been interrupted by the unexpected invasion.

The quick ears of Donna Elena caught her words even in the midst of her own noisy conversation.

"What's that, Clare, about an Egyptian coming here?" she asked, taking the glass of fizzing drink Guido handed her.

"It's a friend of Princess Antonini's mother," Clare replied briefly, seeing the wrath kindle in

Sibyl's brown eyes at what she considered the girl's inquisitive impertinence.

But Donna Elena was not easily snubbed. "Coming to stay here! How delightful! Clare dear, you must invite me every day, won't you? I've never met an Oriental but once and he was a Persian—as savage as a tiger, but beautiful—oh, beautiful! He had a skin like old ivory, and a moustache like black silk, and lips like pomegranates, and his eyes were like live coals that burnt through and through you."

Ferdinand laughed. He did not like her, but she was amusing with her animation and the energy she threw into everything she said and did. "Your words are worthy of the 'Song of Songs,'" he said, "but I don't fancy you will find the Egyptian at all answer to them. I've known many, and they were mostly fair, blue-eyed and fat—rather like Germans."

"Is he a Prince? All the Egyptians are Princes, aren't they?" the girl questioned, fixing Sibyl with her sparkling eyes.

"I know nothing about him except his name," she answered with cold disapproval.

"And what is that?" continued Elena, undaunted.

"His name is Loutfi Sabaheddine," said



Sibyl, exasperated, ignoring her and turning to Ferdinand, as though it was he who had asked.

"Ah, how charming!" exclaimed the irrepressible Elena. "He must be young and handsome to have a name like that!"

"Sabaheddine!" echoed Ferdinand. "I used to know a Prince Sabaheddine when I was in Cairo—one of the numerous cousins of the Khedive. He was enormously wealthy—owned immense property in the Fayoum—but he died last year. This must be his son. I suppose he inherited all the piastres and feddans."

Donna Elena listened with eager interest. She had left off laughing and a little hard glitter came in her eyes which made her look appreciably older.

"I know nothing about him except that my mother is bringing him back from Constantinople with her," said Sibyl, pointedly addressing Ferdinand. "They were to have come to me at Frascati, but Dario's in Sicily and the villa is shut up, so Clare was charming enough to let them come here instead."

Donna Elena remained silent for the space of two minutes, an enormous time for her. She puffed at her cigarette with energy and seemed preoccupied with her thoughts. Meantime the

conversation turned to other things and presently Sibyl and Chetwynd rose and left the arbour together on the pretext of fetching a wrap, as the sun was sinking and the air getting chilly.

When they were gone she turned to Ferdinand, who was watching the crimson glow of the approaching sunset. "You say you've met lots of Egyptians, Maryx—tell me something about them, will you?"

"What shall I tell you?" he replied, a little bored. "They are just like other men, only more so."

"How do you mean—more so?"

"I mean that they have all the characteristics usually attributed to men more strongly pronounced than others—despotism, egoism, jealousy—all the male prerogatives, in fine. In spite of their civilization they remain Pashas at heart, especially in their treatment of women."

"How awful! You mean they beat them?"

"Perhaps!" he said laughing. "They only obey the command of their Prophet if they do. They have all the vices and most of the virtues of children. They are impulsive, generous, and frank to a fault, but quite irresponsible and incapable of self-control. If they want a thing they cannot understand why they should not



have it. You see they are generally enormously rich, and they come to Europe, like so many young Cæsars, with unlimited money, accustomed to tyrannize and have every whim and' caprice obeyed."

"Do they ever marry Europeans?" asked the girl—"Christians I mean."

"It's rare, but it happens sometimes. But these mixed marriages never turn out well. The differences of temperament and education are too great."

"What happens?"

"I knew one Egyptian who married an Austrian, adored her madly for two months and then left her with a demi-mondaine. There was no quarrel and no warning. He just left her one day as he would leave off wearing a tie he was tired of, and when she implored him to return he wired back that she was not to bore him. It's the atavism of centuries. They can't understand that women count as individual entities."

"They aren't very different to our men for the matter of that," said the girl meditatively, as she lighted a fresh cigarette from the stump of her old one. "I don't suppose really there's much difference." Then having finished her catechism

she turned again to her escort and resumed her boisterous talk.

Ferdinand rose. "What a riot of roses!" he said to Clare, glancing at the flowers which even at that early season were showering their blossoms from the pergola and hanging in long trails over the high box walls. "And what perfume! They remind me of those charming words of Jacques Vontade in her 'Domination,' do you remember? 'Des roses et des roses, si folles et si nombreuses! Leur parfum est tel que la couleur et l'arôme se mêlant l'air semble rose. Tout devient rose par ces roses!'"

He leant over the balustrade which hung sheer over the cliff. The sun had almost disappeared, and against the crimson glow the Carrara peaks were silhouetted black and sharp. The silver coils of the Arno had changed their colour and glowed now like a splendid ruby as the river wound its sinuous way towards the sea. Josephine, poetic but practical, was reminded by the atmospheric effects of the lateness of the hour, and exclaimed as she glanced at the watch on her wrist, "Ferdinand! Do you know what the time is! It's nearly seven, and we've got the Erskines arriving by the six o'clock train! They'll be at the villa before us!"

They all left the harbour and walked back



towards the house, Elena and her escort lagging behind. The Maryx' limousine was waiting in front of the door and they turned and bade her farewell as they got in. Josephine, who was genial and liked everybody, told her to be sure and come over soon, and extended her invitation to her bodyguard. As the automobile whirled up the hill on its way to their high-perched castle, the girl turned to Guido Montorsoli, who was close at her heels as usual, and said enviously, "Ouf! it's disgusting to see every one with an automobile except myself! Now I'll have to take that beastly tram and scream all the way back to Florence! Why haven't you got any money, stupid boy! It's no use glaring at me as if you wanted to eat me! You only compromise me by following me about like my shadow. I'll never marry any one who can't give me money! I'm sick of poverty and seeing everybody else driving while I walk. Look here! You must keep out of the way for a bit! I'm going to have a try for the young Egyptian, and I won't be compromised by you. Do you hear?"

The boy's sensitive lips twitched and he grew very red. Nino and Gino had gone towards the house with Clare, and the two were alone in the shadow of the great ilex.

"Elena—Elena—have pity!" he stammered. "I cannot bear it——"

"Bear what!" she snapped, for the sight of the Maryx' limousine had made her irritable. "You don't expect to monopolize me, I hope? As it is I compromise myself with you!"

"But you promised——"

"Promised what! To marry you if your uncle died—but you look more like dying than he with your girl's face and narrow chest! Anyway it's absurd to count on it. I tell you I'm going to have a try for the Egyptian, and if you stand in my way or interfere in the very least, it's all over between us! Do you hear!"

The night had fallen completely, for in Italy there is no twilight, and with the vanishing of the sun the stars begin to hang out their electric lamps without delay. But there was still enough light for her to see the twitching of his lips and the tears which threatened to brim over in spite of his heroic efforts to keep them back.

An emotion of pity exceedingly rare with her surged up in her heart, and she put her lips gently on his to stop their trembling.

He caught her in his arms and held her close. She glanced round quickly to see if they were



observed, and seeing no one, allowed him to hold her so for a moment. Then she drew herself away with a jerk.

"Poverino!" she said, putting her hand caressingly on his arm, "Poverino! I'm very brutal, am I not? I suppose it's the constant struggle with poverty that has hardened me. You don't know what it is because you've never had any money! To have to think about every penny and see one's youth slip by with no time to enjoy it—no time to think of anything except business! And what business! To keep a shop and chaffer and bargain for candles like my grandfather must be amusing compared to the abomination of offering one's self and being refused! It's ignoble, you know! I'd like to marry you, Guido, if it were possible. You are doux and loyal, and you adore me and would let me do everything I want! And besides, I hate foreigners—loathe them, as you know! But it's out of the question—unless, of course, the old Marchese dies, which isn't the least likely. You mustn't hate me for it. Just think of me as a bit of merchandize too dear for your pocket. When I'm married—if I marry this Egyptian, for instance—then—I promise you——"

He shook his curly head sadly.

"Why do you shake your head? Don't you trust me? Look—I give you my word——"

"No!" he said with conviction. "You think you mean it, but I know you better. If you marry a Prince you would want Grand Dukes for lovers. I should have no more chance then than now——"

She laughed.

"Dear little Guido!" she said affectionately. "What a pity I can't marry you! You understand me so well! But I will make an exception for you, for you really are the only person I care a bit about! You shall be my little *greluchon*! I shall be able to afford myself that luxury. Now come! It's getting late and I promised Carlo I'd be back to dinner. I think I hear that rusty old tram screeching round the corner. We shall only just catch it. Come and let's say good-bye to Clare——"

Clare was standing near the entrance, trying to be amiable to the youths Nino and Gino abandoned by their mistress, when Elena came up with the unfortunate Guido in her wake. "Won't you stay to dinner?" she suggested hospitably. "Please do, all of you, and I will send you back in the auto after."

"Thank you, chérie, but it's impossible!



We've got that boring old uncle to dinner. I must tear, too, for I'm late already. But don't forget to invite me to meet your Egyptian! I will never forgive you if you do!"

"But come any day you like—come on Sunday to lunch," said Clare, cordially; "they are sure to be here then."

"Good. I'll come with pleasure and Carlo too!" the girl called out in her strident voice as she hurried down the path to catch the tram at its stopping-point just below the villa.

CHAPTER III

CARLO and Elena were the twin children of the late Marchese Davanti delle Spade, a Tuscan noble who had been one of the gayest and handsomest among the functionaries of the little Court of the Grand Duke Leopoldo. When that Prince was finally expelled by the Revolution of 1859 and the Duchy incorporated into the Kingdom of Italy, his Chamberlain had retired to Rome and accepted office at the Vatican, where he remained till his dissipations obliged the Pope to demand his resignation. He then returned to Florence, and his creditors growing ever more clamorous, had married at the age of sixty the daughter of a retired pizzicheraio who had amassed a large fortune by the sale of Bologna sausages.

The lady, though many years his junior, was plain and sharp-tempered, and night and day his life was a prolonged martyrdom. His punishment was no greater than he deserved, for during the twelve years of their ill-assorted union he



had squandered nearly all her money, and when he died she was left in comparative penury, with two children and a vast amount of debts on her hands.

Brought up during their childhood in luxury, the twins had acquired all the habits of wealth, and just at the age when they could appreciate it, found themselves reduced to what seemed to them sordid poverty. Their mother had made so much bad blood over her fallen fortunes that she had contracted a cancer which carried her off when they had only just left school, and they were confided by their relatives to the care of a spinster aunt who, being of a timid disposition, soon grew to fear the headstrong children, and finally became a complete nonentity in the house.

The recollection of their vanished pomp was very bitter to the twins now that they were compelled to inhabit the top floor of their own Palazzo, and to let out the Piano Signorile to English tenants. The feeling that they were ousted from their nest by the cuckoo British gave them a thorough dislike for the race, but as they both adored amusement, and most of it was provided by the Anglo-Saxon colony, they had perforce to conceal their antipathy.

Carlo Davanti, idle by nature and the exigencies of noble birth, was incapable of any sort

of work, and after the manner of his kind, determined to restore his fallen fortune by a rich marriage. He was gay and handsome, good at games and directing cotillons, and adored flirting, so that he seemed equipped with every requisite for his enterprise. To his compatriots he was irresistible, with his dark amorous eyes, olive skin, and black moustache well brushed back from red sensuous lips. But somehow rich Americans do not bite so quickly as they used. The hook which is to land them must be baited with a more substantial worm than showy beauty and an empty title, even though it dates from the Renaissance, so that at the age of twenty-six Carlo was still wife-hunting in vain among the transatlantic heiresses who throng to Florence during its brief but animated season.

His sister had inherited, besides the good looks and ardent temperament of her patrician father, the shrewdness and energy of her plebeian mother. In society she was celebrated for her brisk and ready wit, which won her the position of leader of the smart set of the little city. Like her brother she was good at sports, adored dancing, tennis, and golf, and her spirits were so high and exuberant that they infected every one with whom she came in contact.



The relations between the twins were on the footing of a commercial enterprise. They were sworn allies on the subject of marriage, and even while Elena was a schoolgirl at the Santissima Annunziata, her chief preoccupation had been to find a wife for Carlo. With that object in view she had systematized her friendships, and taking the automobile as a pecuniary standard, had made friends only with those girls whose parents came to fetch them in elegant limousines. On these she lavished all the wealth of her young affections, inviting them to pass each festa at her home, regaling them with eulogies of Carlo's charms, and managing, in spite of the vigilance of the superiors, that they should often bask in the courtship of Carlo himself.

Carlo, though as a schoolboy he was less far-sighted than his sister, was equally useful to her when they grew up, and spent all the time he could spare from his own quest in cultivating the society of such among the tourists as seemed to warrant the pains. The young English and Americans were only too charmed to accept his invitations, to flirt with his amusing sister, and be introduced at the Tornaquinci Club, but so far not one of them had come up to the scratch, and the twins had reached the mature age of

twenty-six without either of them having reaped the harvest of their labours.

When Clare had appeared on the scene, young, good-looking, and independent, with an automobile, a villa, and the reputation of being richer than she was, they had looked upon her advent as prepared expressly for their benefit, and had been the first to call and try to take her under their wing. But she had resolutely refused all invitations, and they were reduced to haunting churches, galleries, and such-like unfashionable resorts, where only she was to be met. For a month after her arrival she could never enter the Uffizi or Pitti without finding Carlo lost in contemplation of some Tuscan Altarpiece, or Elena busy copying her favourite Botticelli. But Clare, when in the presence of her beloved pictures, was oblivious to all else, and all they got for their pains was a slight bow, and a snub when they persisted in interrupting her.

Elena detested Clare, partly because she was rich, and partly because she was British. In her eyes she personified all the disagreeable characteristics of the race. She was haughty, although she had not even got a title; she was unapproachable, although she was a stranger, and Elena was at the head of Florentine society; she was cold,



and had the arrogance to ignore that Carlo honoured her with matrimonial intentions. But she was rich, and would make a suitable wife for him, and a useful sister-in-law for herself, so she controlled her feelings, and was lavish in her protestations of affection.

Clare, unconscious of their schemes, continued to refuse their invitations, but tolerated, if she did not encourage, their presence at the villa. They were young, gay, and obliging, and she thought them good-natured, so she submitted with a fairly good grace to their frequent calls and proffers of friendship.

The day after Elena's visit to the Schifanoia the twins were smoking their cigarettes in their huge shabby salon on the second story of the Palazzo Davanti, which looks over the Arno towards San Miniato. The walls were covered with ancient threadbare tapestry, and the floors were uncarpeted, except for two large, shabby rugs, on one of which were ranged half a dozen high-backed chairs covered with worn brocade. The lofty ceiling had once been richly decorated, but the stucco ornaments were half broken away, and the general air of the room was one of aristocratic decay. Two sofas, and a few upholstered arm-chairs, were the only concession to comfort

in the room, and in one of these last Elena was lounging, one leg thrown over the other, in her favourite attitude. Her brother, who was less philosophic and more nervous, was pacing up and down, his hands in his pockets, and a worried expression in his eyes.

"You've played your cards like an idiot, Carlo!" she was saying. "All the opportunities I've made you, and nothing to show for them! Six months sheer waste of time! And now, of course, the Egyptian will get her!"

"Of course!" echoed her brother despondently.

"Unless I prevent it!" she said suddenly, blowing a cloud of smoke from her nostrils.

He paused in front of her with a half sneer on his red lips.

"And how will you prevent it?"

"By making him fall in love with me, naturally."

He looked down at her critically, appraising her attractions. He admired his sister, and he was not a bit in love with Clare, but he could not help seeing that, with the weight of her wealth in the balance, Elena's chances were but slight.

"Cara sorella!" he summed up, his scrutiny



over. "You are charming and clever, but she is rich. The chances are against you."

"Zut!" she replied. "I've got two irresistible forces on my side."

"Which are ——?"

"My own energy and her indifference."

"But you've exerted your energy so often in vain!" said her pessimistic brother.

"None of the men you've found me have been worth so much effort as this," she replied. "To begin with, they were Anglo-Saxon, and I hate the race! Next, they had no title, and I confess it would need a lot of money to make me support being called Mrs. ! Now the Egyptian has everything—wealth, youth, and a title! I should be Princess, which is even more chic than Donna! Oh, Carlo! How splendid! I must succeed! I will succeed! I'm longing to begin the campaign!"

And she got up from her chair, seized her brother round the waist and, whistling an accompaniment, dragged him into the measures of the Grizzly Bear, which had just been introduced into the Florentine balls.

"Basta! Basta!" he exclaimed, disengaging himself. "I only wish I had your toupet! I can't believe it will be as easy as you think! People don't marry paupers nowadays!"

"I don't despair!" she said, throwing herself into a chair. "Maryx says that these Egyptians are generous, impulsive, and hot-blooded. Generous, impulsive, and hot-blooded——," she repeated emphatically, checking off the qualities on her fingers. "It's a perfect combination for my plan."

He shrugged his shoulders sceptically. "Please God it may succeed!" he said fervently. "I lost a thousand lire at the club again last night, and the bills pour in every day. We must find something soon or we shall be done for!"

"Don't be afraid!" replied his sister, confidently. "This is my first serious opportunity, and if I fail I shall be unworthy of my blood. I intend to marry the Egyptian by fair means or foul, and have automobiles and diamonds and yachts, and a hotel in Paris and a villa at Monte Carlo, and everything that makes life worth living! Oh, how good it will be! I'm so sick of poverty. Life is worth living only when one is rich! And rich we will be!"

She flashed a brilliant glance at her brother—a glance so full of conquest that it ignited in his sombre eyes a responsive gleam. So infectious are energy and hope!

He shrugged his shoulders, however, willing



to believe, yet too despondent to give much weight to her words. Besides, it was so obviously absurd to plan what she should do after her marriage with a man whom she had never seen, whom no one knew anything about—an Oriental, too, who might have half a dozen wives already. It was mere childish folly.

"Instead of trying to discourage me," she went on, irritated by his lack of grit, "why don't you make an effort on your own account with Clare? I undertake to clear the path for you, but no one but yourself can do the work. You let your opportunities slip so stupidly! It's six months now since we've known her—been intimate with her, thanks to me—and you are no farther advanced than you were at the beginning. When do you intend to leave off platronics and start work in earnest?"

"I'm afraid of her—that's the fact!" he replied. "I've never come across any one so indifferent. She treats me as if I were not there, and if I pay her the least compliment she snubs me. I'm not Pygmalion to animate a statue! The only things she cares to talk about are the things of which I know nothing and care less—statues, pictures, and books. We haven't one thing in common—not one! And if I ever

succeed in marrying her, God knows how it will be possible to live with her! But it's absurd to think of it. I never shall succeed!"

"You certainly won't if you set about it in that spirit!" said his sister, eyeing him disdainfully. She was the stronger of the two and had the right to treat him as an inferior. "You had better follow my advice and make open love to her. You are handsome, Carlo mio, if you are not very wise, and no woman is indifferent to good looks."

"No Italian woman perhaps!" he retorted. "But these Northerners are like ice!"

"All ice can be melted!" she replied. "Try at least! We lunch there on Sunday. While I'm captivating the boy you start work on her. It will clear the way for me in any case! Take her to the bosco and play on her senses! All women can be got if you set about it the right way."

"You always think you know better than I!" he said irritably. "You will see! She will only kick me out, and if she does you will share my fate."

"Rubbish!" she retorted. "And if I do get kicked out I will see that I take Loutfi Sabaheddine with me!"



CHAPTER IV

"**H**ERE we are, safe and sound! But it's a wonder we ever arrived at all! Such snails these Italian trains!" exclaimed Mrs. Potter, descending with much fuss and bustle on the platform of the Florence station one hour after the express was due. "Loutfi, my child, please look after Jane's basket. Don't let it out of your sight for one moment! Annie has so much to do, and there are never any porters in these stations!"

But Clare and Sibyl, aware of the number of Mrs. Potter's impedimenta, had not only brought with them the Schifanoia footman, but had provided no less than three facchini, so that the number of hands outstretched for rugs and bags was almost embarrassing.

"No! No! Not the basket!" she cried out, as the footman tried to relieve of his burden the young man who followed her. "I can't have any one touch Jane but Loutfi," she explained to her daughter. "Loutfi, my child, this is our

kind hostess, Miss Glynne, and my daughter Sibyl. Oh, take care! You will drop her, the precious thing, if you try to take off your hat! Give her to me, quick—my darling Jane!" And seizing the basket, from which a prolonged "Miaou-ou!" proclaimed the nature of the contents, she set it with care on a pile of portmanteaux and peeped cautiously inside.

"Look!" she said to Clare, who was watching with sympathetic interest. "Did you ever see such beauties! They were born the night we arrived in Naples."

Clare, who adored cats, peeped too, and met the round yellow eyes of a superb tabby, big as a young tiger, who was reclined houri-like on a soft cushion, with four large kittens prodding vaguely at her stomach.

Sibyl called them both to order. "You are just as bad as my mother, Clare! One would think that idiotic cat was of more importance than any of us! It's two o'clock and we are all dying of hunger, and you stay on in this dirty station fussing over that horrible Jane!"

"Forgive me!" she said, laughing and looking at the young man, who was watching her with eager interest. "We'll hurry back at once!"



At first sight his appearance pleased her. He seemed very young and fresh, with a frank and half boyish manner. His hair was yellow and curly, his eyes bright and blue, and his skin fair and smooth as a girl's. The face was familiar to her, though for the moment she could not recall where she had seen it. How did she know so well those full lips, sensuous yet sensitive, those almond-shaped vivacious eyes, and that contradictory expression of physical energy and moral weakness? As he stooped to close the lid of Jane's basket at Mrs. Potter's request, she watched him with the vague feeling that his colouring was wrong, and that he ought to be of terra-cotta.

"I know!" she exclaimed suddenly to Sibyl as they all walked down the platform together. "He's exactly like Pollaiuolo's bust of a young warrior in the Bargello! The likeness is quite extraordinary!"

Sibyl remembered the bust well, since they had had one of their many disputes before it the previous day, Clare maintaining that the face was that of a weak sensualist, Sibyl that it was strong and pure as a young saint. "Certainly he's very like!" she agreed. "I was wondering myself where I had seen him before. I suppose now

you've found that out you will take him en grippe for what you will call moral weakness!"

Clare laughed. "I haven't so far," she said; "on the contrary, I find him very sympathetic."

When at last they were all installed in the limousine, Sibyl and Loutfi in front, the others with Jane's basket between them behind, Mrs. Potter took Clare's hand and patted it affectionately.

"I'm so glad to see you, my dear!" she said warmly. "So kind of you to ask my boy too. He's the Benjamin of my old age, you know! Such a dear! I don't know what I should have done without him in that awful yali!"

"Why is it awful?" asked Clare, amused. "I thought it was a delicious place."

"Oh, well! Beautiful it is, or will be when I've got rid of the smell! Do you know, my dear" (she lowered her voice to a tragic whisper), "why I had to come away?"

"No—tell me."

"My dear! The place was swarming—positively swarming—with *bugs*!" Clare looked aghast. She knew nothing of the houses on the Bosphorus, and her English mind connected bugs with the most sordid penury.

"Oh, you know, these wooden houses on the Bosphorus all have them more or less!" Mrs.



Potter went on, smiling at her horror. "But this one had been empty for years and—well, it was quite indescribable! Between each plank there were millions—millions! I was wild! I wanted to make a lawsuit and leave it then and there, but Loutfi came to the rescue. He undertook to get rid of them, and sent people to fumigate it, and in a couple of days there wasn't one to be seen. But the smell of the stuff they had used was awful—worse than the bugs almost! So I had to come away. But tell me how you like my boy. Isn't he charming?"

Mrs. Henry J. Potter, celebrated throughout the United States for her wealth, her eccentricities, and her good heart, was fat and short, but in spite of these impediments to movement was one of the most spirited and energetic old ladies imaginable. She was a spoilt child of fortune, for she had left the house of a rich and adoring father to enter that of a rich and adoring husband; both had lived for nothing but to minister to her caprices, and both had left her sole heiress to their fortunes when they died. Except when she bore Sibyl she had never had a day's illness in her life, and even at that critical epoch she only stayed in bed because every one else did, and it seemed too eccentric to get up and behave as though nothing

had happened. Her enormous vitality was satisfied with nothing but swift and continuous movement, and she was never content to stay more than a fortnight in any place. The invention of automobiles was in her eyes the most solid benefit to humanity since the introduction of railways. She sold her horses at once, bought the most powerful machine in the market, and thenceforth spent the greater part of her time tearing over the four continents at sixty miles an hour. Sibyl said that if it were not for Jane—the constant companion of her travels—she would long ago have bought an aeroplane.

"What a lovely place!" she exclaimed, as they came in sight of the long arched portico of the villa. "It's more beautiful even than the Bosphorus, isn't it, Loutfi, child?"

The boy turned a pair of flashing blue eyes towards them, which embraced Clare as well as Mrs. Potter in their glance.

"It's perfect!" he said enthusiastically. "And it really is rather like the Bosphorus with all those dark trees against the hills!"

"Like the Bosphorus without the Bosphorus!" laughed Sibyl.

After lunch was over and the travellers had retired to their rooms to change, Clare and Sibyl



sat smoking on the terrace and discussing the new-comer. Sibyl was enthusiastic in his praise. "He's like a Greek God!" she exclaimed. "So young and fresh! And even after that awful journey, which made me as black as ink, he managed to look clean! I wonder how old he is!"

"He's twenty-five, Mrs. Potter told me," said Clare.

"As much as that! He looks about eighteen! He's perfectly fascinating, isn't he? I must take him to Paris with me, he'd make quite a sensation! But look! There's mamma already! Did you ever know anything so quick! She can't stay in her own room even after a journey more than half an hour at a time."

Mrs. Potter's portly form was seen emerging from the loggia, followed by the footman with the tea, which Clare generally had on the terrace under the shade of a huge spreading ilex. When she was comfortably installed in an arm-chair with her tea beside her and a footstool at her feet, Sibyl began to ply her with questions. She was dying to hear all about Loutfi before he came out. "Tell us quickly, mamma! How did you discover him? He's perfectly adorable."

"Ah, Loutfi's a good child," replied her

mother in her comfortable voice, with an inflection of proprietorship; "I'm very fond of him. To begin at the beginning, he's the only child of Prince Ibrahim Sabaheddine who died last year."

"And left him all his money?" interrupted Sibyl.

"Not at all! He's not got a penny, poor boy! He's entirely dependent on his mother, who's still young and the most fanatical fury in the world. She has the yali opposite mine at Vanikeuy, and is noted for her fat and her violent temper. She killed her poor husband by the scenes she made him. I saw her once on the Eaux Douces. My dear, such a sight! She had her veil down so that I couldn't see her face, but I never saw anybody so fat, nor any fat so fluid. It rolled and undulated with the movement of the boat and flowed into the corners of the seat like a mould."

"But tell us about the boy!" said Sibyl, impatiently. "How does he manage to speak English so well and look so chic?"

"Don't be in such a hurry, Sibyl," said her mother, who loved to hear herself talk. "You see, his father was very modern in his ideas, and he had an English tutor for him and sent him to the military college in Vienna when he was



twenty. They say that was the cause of his death, for his mother was so furious that she never ceased abusing him, and she's so violent no one can control her. It was a perpetual fight to get him back, and when the poor man died, worn out with her tongue, she forced him to leave the army at once."

"He gave up his career and everything and obeyed as if he were a child?" asked Clare, thinking of the bust and its weak mouth. "It was rather feeble-minded, wasn't it?"

"My dear, what could the poor child do? She wouldn't give him a penny, and you know how expensive it is in those crack Austrian regiments. She just starved him out, and when he was safe in her clutches she wouldn't let him see anybody—not even the Embassy people. She's horribly fanatical and calls us all Ghiours!"

"But how did you get hold of him, mamma?"

"Well, it's a long story," replied Mrs. Potter, prepared to enjoy the telling. "It was like this. I had bumped—you can't call it anything else on those roads—in the auto to Pera to do some shopping, and had stayed late paying a few visits, and just as we were returning we had an awful panne. You know what the streets

are like there, Clare—a series of pitfalls and hillocks! You have to clutch at your hat with one hand and to the side of the carriage with the other. Well, two of the tires were smashed and one of the wheels so badly damaged that there was no hope of getting back that night. I was in despair! The last boat had left and none of the drivers would go so far at that hour. So I had to make up my mind to spend the night at the Pera Palace, and I was just ordering a room and telling them to send out for a brush and comb, when Loutfi, who was standing near and heard my woes, came forward with that charming frank way of his and begged me to let him row me back to the yali. He knew who I was, it seems. Of course I was only too delighted! Imagine what it would have been to sleep at the hotel with no maid and nothing—not even a nightgown! So he drove me down to the bridge, and there was a lovely long white caïque with three rowers in red velvet and gold, as gorgeous as the Sultan's—(you know it's very seldom one sees these old-fashioned caïques nowadays). Well, he was so polite and kind, and looked so handsome in his white clothes and red fez, that I quite lost my heart and asked him to come and see me.



"He came the next day and told me his story—how his mother tyrannized over him and wouldn't let him see any one except fanatics like herself; how he hated the life—nothing but intrigues and quarrels from morning to night; how she wanted him to marry a Turkish girl whom he had never seen and who came of a family as fanatical as herself; and how she refused to give him any money unless he consented. Ah, well! Poor boy! He didn't look radiant then! I never saw anybody so miserable!"

"But how did she let him travel with you if she's so fanatical?"

"Oh, there was a frightful scene when she found out that he came to my house, and when I settled to leave after the bug affair I was telling Clare this morning, he seemed so miserable that I hadn't the heart to leave him behind. So I invited him to come with me. It seems she had hysterics and screamed and raved for hours when he told her, and wouldn't give him a penny for his journey. It was an impossible life for a young man brought up as he had been, so I persuaded him to come all the same and let me be his banker."

"And he left his mother and came away like that—with a stranger!" exclaimed Clare, her

British ideas revolted in spite of her theories of independence.

"Don't you talk!" retorted Sibyl. "It's only what you did yourself when you left John and Emily and Ethel! You aren't going to preach the duties of family life, I hope!"

"Oh, that was quite different," said Clare, a little illogically; "but if I had had a mother—who knows!"

"Mother, sister, or brother—it's synagogue, as a Jewess of my acquaintance says," rejoined Sibyl. "But here comes the young god! You must finish another time, mamma!"

He looked very handsome in his white flannels and straw hat as he came across the lawn, and Clare could not reconcile the fact that this slim English-looking boy, with his girl's skin and gold curls, was really the descendant of the blustering conqueror of Egypt, whose portrait, gaudy and glossy, she remembered having seen in Cairo, with red face and fat stomach, squatting among a pile of gold-fringed cushions.

Loutfi never took his eyes off her, and even Sibyl, in her most attractive Poiret gown, only came in for a small share of his attention. He had known Englishwomen before, but never one of this type—so unconscious of herself, with the



look and bearing of a young goddess. After six months of his mother's turbulent society it was very soothing to see any one so serene.

He had also a strange attraction for her. The narrative of his chequered fortunes had, in spite of her disapproval of his unfilial behaviour, touched responsive chords in her heart, for nothing was so terrible in her eyes as dependence on the whims and caprices of others. An odd comprehension of Mrs. Potter's maternal affection for him came over her as she looked at his eager face. He seemed made for enjoyment, and there was something about him faun-like, buoyant and gay like a young animal, which attracted her.

"What a magnificent view!" he exclaimed, looking down at the blue stretch of valley, in the centre of which lies Florence, almond-shaped still, though straggling beyond her ancient symmetrical lines. "And that is Florence down there—the City of Flowers? It is well named. Even on the Bosphorus we have not such beautiful flowers as these in your garden."

She was charmed and surprised to hear him speak so appreciatively of nature, for Mrs. Potter had told her coming up in the automobile that the country bored him, and that he cared only for cities. She did not know that Sibyl had prompted

him that if he wanted to make himself agreeable he must talk of nothing but nature and art.

"There are wonderful things to be seen in the Museums, are their not?" he went on, playing his cards so quickly that Sibyl almost laughed.

"Yes," she replied, delighted. "You must let me be your guide, and show you some of them, if you really care."

"Ah, how delightful!" he exclaimed, enthusiastically. "Do take me to-morrow, Miss Glynne."

Mrs. Potter looked up astonished. It was new to her to see him so interested in flowers and pictures, but seeing he was making a good impression she remained tactfully silent. As for Loutfi, he was falling head over ears in love with his hostess. He followed all her movements with eager eyes, and they had such a sparkle in them that he looked ten times handsomer than ever, Mrs. Potter thought. Mrs. Potter liked Clare, and she adored her boy, and as they sat talking together, with the sun shining on their gold hair and fresh skin, she thought what a charming and well-assorted couple they would make, and that if he were married to her poor Loutfi's financial troubles would be at an end. The idea took root in her mind, and that evening



when Sibyl came to her room while she was dressing for dinner, she imparted it with gathered enthusiasm to her, begging for her co-operation in bringing it about. Sibyl was only too charmed, for she had a genuine affection for Clare, and being convinced that no woman can be really happy unmarried, she considered she would be doing her the most friendly service in helping her to find so charming a husband.

Loutfi and Clare had arranged that they would go to the Uffizi the following day, and in the morning, for it was Sunday, and the galleries closed at one. Besides, Clare remembered with a little irritation, it was the day Elena Davanti and her brother were coming to lunch. Sibyl refused to accompany them on the plea of being sick of statues and pictures, and Mrs. Potter was too fatigued—or said she was—after her journey. Loutfi was charmed to think he should be alone with Clare, and Clare herself looked forward with impatience to showing her beloved paintings to this kindred soul, and implanting in his receptive, if barren mind, the first seeds of an æsthetic education. How delightful if she could really develop the artistic tastes of this charming boy, who seemed so interested, but who, as further conversation had revealed, was absolutely ignorant

of every form of art, Christian, Pagan, or Moham-medan, and had never heard of Pheidias, much less of Michelangelo and Botticelli.

It would be turning up new and virgin soil, and who knows what treasures she might find in the process !



CHAPTER V

THE morning had come and gone, Loutfi and Clare had arrived at the gallery as soon as the doors were opened, and had spent two quite delicious hours, she in discoursing on the charms of Titian's colouring, he in beatific contemplation of her own. She had chosen the Pitti in preference to the Uffizi, considering that a beginner, to whom the Bible and Early Fathers are sealed books, and who is incapable of distinguishing a Madonna from a Buddha, would certainly find the sensuous Venetians more attractive than the crabbed Tuscans. To Loutfi it was all one, so long as he could watch her animated face, and inhale the perfume of her clothes and hair; and had she been less preoccupied, she must have observed that while she was pointing out the marvels of the Bella's robes, and the Magdalen's gold hair, his eyes were riveted on her, and not at all on those voluptuous ladies. But no matter! The morning passed most agreeably to both, and

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if Titian remained but a vague figure in the mind of her pupil, he, prompted by Sibyl the evening before, was so discreet in his remarks that she was unaware of it. She thought him on the contrary wonderfully apt and receptive, and it was not till their return that a slight suspicion crossed her mind, when Sibyl maliciously catechized him on his impressions, and soon elicited the fact that he had received none. Sibyl thoroughly enjoyed his embarrassment, and Clare's growing surprise, and continued her cross-examination pitilessly, till suddenly catching Mrs. Potter's eye, she remembered their compact, and changed the conversation.

"You've got that insufferable young woman coming to lunch, haven't you?" she asked. "She reminded me the other day of your beloved Nike when she came whirling into the arbour. And she's got a voice like a dozen peacocks. We'd better stuff our ears with cotton-wool before she arrives."

The bell rang as she spoke, and as though to justify her words the voice of Elena, high and piercing, was heard in the hall. Loutfi winced. It reminded him of the harem of his mother, the Princess Melek, where some one was always screaming. But he was nevertheless thankful for the diversion.



Elena entered with her usual impetuosity, prepared for conquest in her most becoming clothes. She was certainly very attractive with her crisp black hair, clear olive skin, and flashing eyes—the personification of energy and animal spirits. She grasped Clare's hand vigorously, nodded patronizingly to Sibyl, and scarcely waited for Loutfi to be presented before she engaged him in a brisk and noisy conversation. He responded with equal vigour, for her spirits were contagious, and being masculine, he was well content with her advances and the looks of open admiration she cast him.

As with all Elena's admirers, his appreciation soon began to take the form of rather familiar joking. At luncheon they were opposite each other, and Clare was amazed at the change in the boy whose manner to herself had been so courteous. Elena kept up an endless war of words, of badinage and jokes, and he responded in the same spirit, occasionally with a touch of what seemed to Clare like impertinence. But just as she was thinking how mistaken she had been in him and that he wasn't so charming after all, he would turn and say something to herself or Mrs. Potter with the deferential courtesy which was so conspicuously absent in

his manner to Elena. So she contented herself with thinking that, like the Pollaiuolo bust he resembled, he was morally weak, and was not at bottom displeased that he made a distinction between them.

She was so preoccupied with her thoughts that she almost forgot the existence of Carlo, who was sitting on her left and kept plying her with compliments as a preliminary to his campaign. He was somewhat nervous, for Elena had been bullying him for the last three days, and had finally elicited a solemn promise of obedience. Her energetic soul loathed procrastination, and Carlo was so lazy! She never doubted his success if he went to work the right way, for she was incapable of judging other women except by herself, and she would have found his showy good-looks and caressing manners irresistible.

But Carlo, though fatuous, was less courageous and optimistic than his sister, and was appalled at the prospect of the snub he was sure of receiving. So he primed himself for the attack with deep draughts of the red Chianti, which was made on the Schifanoia property and of unusual strength.

Elena was anything but nervous. She was in the highest spirits, for she found the boy handsomer and more charming than she had expected,



and it was evident that she was making a favourable impression. Loutfi was certainly dazzled by her brilliance; and the shuttlecock of repartee whizzed sharp and fast between them. Mrs. Potter, generally delighted when her boy was enjoying himself, looked graver than usual, for she feared in Elena an obstacle to her matrimonial schemes. Sibyl, not averse to a flirtation on her own account, and admiring Carlo's bellâtre type, had succeeded in diverting his compliments from Clare to her more appreciative self. As the meal proceeded the noise grew almost bewildering, what with Elena's shrill voice pitched several keys higher than usual, and what with Sibyl trying to make her own heard above it, and Clare was thankful when it came to an end and she could propose a move to the terrace.

This was the propitious moment for Carlo's attack, and as they rose from the table Elena shot him a glance so imperious that he could not choose but obey. He felt as brave as a lion now, for he was well primed with the Chianti, and Sibyl's evident admiration had given him self-confidence. So he turned obediently to her as she stood caressing her Pekingese spaniel Claudine, and begged her with a tender glance to show him some tulips of which she had

just before spoken as being very rare and exquisite.

"Certainly, I shall be delighted to show them to you," replied Clare, who had not noticed either his compliments or tender glance. "They are the deepest yellow I ever saw without being orange, and the shape of the cups is a marvel."

She called Claudine to follow and they traversed the lawn towards the tulip-beds which lay in the full sunshine of the cliff-front. Carlo grew a little nervous as the critical moment approached, and wished with all his heart it was the gracious Sibyl and not the cold and indifferent Clare whose conquest he had undertaken. Not that he was generally timid in his amours, but this Englishwoman, with her indifference and total absence of vanity, seemed to him like a keyless piano or stringless violin, without means of contact between player and instrument.

Clare was quite content to conduct him to her tulip bed, but arrived there, was surprised that he showed so little interest. He did his best to simulate it, but caring nothing for flowers it was so obviously forced, that she was preparing to return to the rest of the party, when he seized the bull by the horns and begged her to take a turn in the bosco close by. "It looks so cool



in there and it's so hot to-day," he said. And that he felt it so was evident, for the perspiration stood in beads on his brow.

Clare had no special reason for refusing, and was rather glad to give Claudine a run, so she assented, and they entered the winding path beneath the thick shade of the ilex trees.

The heat of the sun's rays, together with the fumes of the Chianti, had warmed Carlo's blood to the desired pitch, and he followed her amorously, inhaling the delicious perfume of Parma violets she left in her wake. He was no admirer of nature, but the beauty of the place worked upon his senses unconsciously and stirred what little poetry he had in him. The path was soft and green with moss, and on either side a tiny stream gurgled down a stone channel filled with maiden-hair fern. It was cool as a grotto, and the light glinted among the dark leaves here and there like patches of gold in a rich brocade. It was a spot made for love and amorous emprise.

"It is delicious here—like this—alone with you!" he murmured in the caressing voice he found so irresistible among his young compatriots.

Clare was disagreeably surprised. Certainly he had often paid her crude compliments, but it was the first time he had dared to assume a

lover's tone, and the vibration in his voice irritated her. She thought it wiser to ignore it however, and walked on in silence.

A sudden turn in the path brought them to a grassy plot among the trees, in the midst of which a grove of cypresses surrounded a tiny ruined chapel. On either side of the porch, which was surmounted by a blue and white Madonna of the Robbia school, was a broken bench set in the wall.

"This chapel always reminds me of La Verna," she remarked, trying to direct the conversation to impersonal topics. "The whole bosco is like a miniature La Verna, don't you think?"

"Yes," he rejoined, gazing at her with amorous eyes. "And you are like your namesake Saint Clare, for I fear you have renounced earthly love!"

This remark was received also in stony silence, but a dangerous light came in her eyes which should have warned him he was on quicksands. She bitterly regretted that she had allowed herself to be enticed to the indiscreet solitude of the bosco, and wondered how she could get out of it without being rude or letting him think she was afraid. "Men are so vain," she thought. "He



might take it as a compliment. How much nicer English and Americans are! One can't be alone with an Italian for five minutes without his making love to one—and so stupidly and impertinently too—just as if it were expected of them, and one would be disappointed if they didn't."

"Let us sit down here!" said Carlo, softly, mistaking her silence for encouragement. "It is so seldom you grant me a moment alone with you" (very tenderly this time, for he thought he was making progress).

She glanced at him severely, but met only a look of bold admiration in his black eyes and a fatuous smile on his red lips. She hardly knew how to deal with him without impoliteness which she was unwilling to use to a guest.

The Chianti had rendered Carlo impervious to hints. Did not the delighted Italian girls to whom he paid his court, invariably begin by silence and a modest reserve, and as invariably end by yielding to his charms? Silence, according to his experience, was but a discreet way of saying—"Continue!" So he was not at all discountenanced.

"Yes!" he exclaimed, trying to take her hand, which hung by her side with a yellow tulip

she had picked. "Yes! I have something to say which has been on my mind ever since I first saw you!"

She drew her hand quickly away with a gesture of annoyance, and said frigidly, "It is cold and damp here, Marchese, we will go back to the terrace."

"Ah! You will not listen to me?" he murmured more caressingly still. "You are cruel, Santa Chiara! Stay a little while I beg you!" And he made another effort to take her hand, and succeeded in withdrawing the tulip, which he kissed and put in his button-hole.

His persistence disgusted her. She let the tulip go but drew away her hand more sharply, at the same time flashing him an annihilating glance.

But Carlo was not annihilated. He was not even snubbed. On the contrary, a wine-inspired optimism made him see everything of rose-colour, and he considered he was getting on brilliantly. One step more, he thought, one assured step, and she was his—and not only she, but her bosco, her villa, her automobile, and her balance at the banker's with which to pay his accumulated debts. Already he felt her melting in his arms, quivering with vanquished modesty, as he had felt so many of his compatriots.



"Amore mio!" he murmured in his lowest, most vibrating tone.

At this rapid advance Clare forgot her hostess' scruples and glared at him with a resentment so fierce that even he could not misinterpret it. "You are mad!" she exclaimed angrily. "How dare you speak to me like this!" And calling Claudine, who was sniffing indifferently with her short black nose beneath the door of the chapel, she prepared to retrace her steps.

But Carlo had gone too far now to draw back. He had put one foot across the Rubicon, and, as every one knows, the second costs nothing. Moreover, he was not quite sure yet that her anger was not mere maidenly modesty which a little persistence might overcome. So he barred her passage and again tried to take her hand.

"Yes, I am mad—mad with love!" he exclaimed, growing ever more passionate and pleading. "Have pity on me, Miss Glynne! Don't leave me desperate like this!"

"Let me pass, please!" she said icily, "and cease this ridiculous talk. It is very disagreeable and very absurd at the same time."

The contemptuous words stung him to soberness. "I really don't see why my love should be either absurd or disagreeable," he said. And

he drew himself up to his full height with a look which might have been haughty had not the Chianti made it slightly vacillating.

"Please allow me to pass!" Clare repeated, as quietly as her growing anger permitted. "And if you care to retain my friendship give up this absurd attitude."

"Ah, I pray you listen to me!" he persisted. "I have cared for you ever since I first saw you—six months ago, but you have been so cold that I have not dared to speak of my love. But now—now—Miss Glynne—Clare—let me call you by your name!—now I can no longer control it——"

"Stop!" she exclaimed. "I have already told you that your words are intensely disagreeable to me! Your insistence is an insult!"

"An insult!" he exclaimed, growing very red. "An insult—to ask you to be my wife! After all, I am not your inferior! I bear a great name even if my fortune is small."

She had never been courted with so little tact and so much persistence, and she was fast losing what few grains of patience she had left. It seemed to her there was but one way to fight such fatuous obstinacy. Her fingers tingled, and she hoped devoutly he would not goad her to



that! It would be scandalous, but—under the circumstances—surely permissible!

"Let me pass!" she repeated, motioning him out of her way with the imperious gesture of one who reproves an insolent servant.

He began to realize that she was in earnest, and her contempt stung him to fury. He—the Marchese Davanti delle Spade, with the patrician blood—mixed though it was—of half a thousand years in his veins—he—to be disdained—threatened—metaphorically kicked out of her path—because he had done her the honour to ask her to be his wife! It was monstrous! He forgot his factitious passion, forgot her wealth and his own debts, forgot even Elena's wrath—in his desire to avenge his outraged dignity and repay insult with insult. Before the menace in her eyes he drew aside ceremoniously to let her pass, but said with stinging irony as he did so, bowing with mock submission, "Alas! I'm not so fortunate as the charming Egyptian! Certainly he is richer than I and a Prince! I should not have dared to compete with him!"

She swung round as though he had struck her.

"What do you mean by that impertinence?" she asked.

"I mean," he sneered, "that you never took your eyes off him all lunch and that it needs no great penetration to see that you are in love with him. Evidently I owe my rebuff to that!"

She stiffened like a statue and motioned him from her with a gesture so imperious that he obeyed involuntarily. "Leave the place at once!" she said with authority. "You will find the gate on the public road at the bottom of that path." Then, calling Claudine, who was lying tranquilly in a patch of sunlight that had penetrated the thick foliage, she disappeared down the way they had come without taking any further notice of him.

* * * * *

"Where's Carlo?" Elena called out in her strident voice, seeing her return alone across the grass.

"The Marchese has gone home," she answered coldly. And Elena knew that he had spoken and that his overtures had been ill received. But she was too charmed with her own success to give it much importance.

"Idiot!" she said to herself. "He drank too much of that strong Chianti. I suppose he made love to her as if she were one of his own contadine!"

* * * * *



That evening was a stormy one at the Palazzo Davanti. Elena had not returned till the dinner was on the table, and was in her highest, most boisterous spirits. Carlo sat opposite to her without speaking a word, his brows bent, his eyes flashing angrily at her across the table. When the old factotum, who acted as valet and butler, had finally retired, he rose from his chair, gave the cat, which was lying in his way, a vicious kick, and began to pace up and down the room like an enraged beast. His sister watched him with undisguised amusement, swinging her foot and puffing at her cigarette.

"What's the matter, silly boy?" she asked presently. "You look as if you would like to kill and eat me! I suppose you made as many gaffes as usual! Did she horsewhip you? She looks capable of it!"

"She turned me out as if I were a dog! Damn her arrogance and your folly! As if a Davanti were not fit to mate with an English commoner! It's all your fault, fool that you are! I knew what would happen if I followed your counsel!"

"Keep your temper, Carlo mio, and stop abusing me!" she retorted, half angry, half amused. "I suppose you went to work with

your usual imbecility! I knew you would make a mess of it when I saw you drinking all that Chianti at luncheon. You're an absolute idiot when you drink! What did you do?—kiss her and expect her to thank you?"

"Basta! Accidente!" he shouted, enraged at her mockery. "It's all your fault! You insisted on my making love to her against my own judgment! I knew it would be better to wait!"

"Oh, wait—wait!" echoed his sister impatiently. "If you followed your own instincts you would wait for everything till the day of judgment! It's the only thing you know how to do!"

"Well, you've made a nice mess of it, anyway!" he muttered sulkily. "I'm kicked out, as I warned you I should be, and you will probably share the same fate if you try to go there again! So there's an end of your famous marriage as well as of mine!"

"What an incorrigible idiot you are, Carlo!" she said serenely. "I don't play my cards so stupidly as you! I don't care whether I'm kicked out or not now. Je m'en fiche of her and her Schifanoia! The boy's over head and ears in love with me, and has asked permission to



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call. That's all I wanted. I've done more in a day than I expected to do in a week!"

"Zut!" said her brother sceptically. "He amuses himself with you because you are gay, and she's as grave as a patriarch; but any one can see that it's she, not you, he's in love with! I watched him at luncheon, and I know!"

From which speech it will be seen that, though his sister called him an imbecile, in certain things he showed more penetration than herself.

CHAPTER VI

A WEEK had gone by and Mrs. Potter, unable to remain longer in one place, had whisked Loutfi and her daughter off to Paris. Her automobile had arrived from Naples, and she had insisted on performing the whole journey by road, intending to linger at the little towns on the way. Her Renault 65 H.P. was large and commodious, for though she loved speed she loved comfort even more, and did not at all approve of travelling in an open machine to be choked by the dust and tormented by the wind. The four seats were all equally comfortable, and all faced the view, so she had begged Clare to accompany them, and Loutfi had added his prayers with pressing insistence. He had lost his heart completely during the days they had spent together, days in which they were hardly ever apart, in spite of Elena's efforts to attract him to the Palazzo Davanti. Sibyl was immersed in her flirtation with Chetwynd, for which she had no time when in Paris, and Mrs.



Potter kept discreetly in the background, making rapid excursions in the mountains, with Jane and her maid as sole companions. Loutfi had left her no peace in his efforts to make her join them, but she resisted, for she was anxious to go on with a book she was writing on Mantegna, which was nearing completion. Moreover, she had never passed the month of May in Florence, and was looking forward to enjoy the garden in that loveliest of seasons.

The time of flowers had already begun. The roses were rioting in a wealth of blossom over every wall, and hanging from every tree-trunk and pergola, scattering the grass and paths with thick carpets of red and white petals. The blue-green lizards, larger and more brilliant at Fiesole than elsewhere, were darting hither and thither in the sunshine. The fireflies were opening and shutting their tiny electric lamps, flashing so thickly in the paths that they seemed like a fiery barrier through which, Siegfried-like, one must push a way. The nightingales were throbbing passionately in the bosco, and the shrill saw of the grilli, and the chirp and croak of the frogs, were almost deafening. How could she tear herself away from all this delicious tumult to go to a commonplace city, with nothing of Nature but

the sear acacias of the Bois, or at best the artificial forest of Versailles, so much more the work of Lenôtre than of God.

So she had resisted his prayers, promising to go later when the heat should have driven her northward, and waving them Godspeed from the terrace, had watched them whirl round the curves of the hill till they were lost in a cloud of dust. Then she returned to her cool rooms, meaning to pick up the threads of her old life, and finish her book without interruption.

The dew was still on the grass, for in spite of Sibyl's protests Mrs. Potter had insisted on starting almost at cock-crow, in order to avoid the midday heat. They had planned to reach Lucca in time for lunch, and Clare caught herself longing to be with them when they should arrive in the charming old town. She thought of the spacious hotel, once a palace, and still eloquent of its ancient glory, and of the delicious food and golden wine in huge rush-covered flasks they would enjoy with appetites made keen by the good air. If she were there, she thought, she would have taken Loutfi across the square while the others were resting, and shown him the Tomb of Ilaria, sleeping her deathless sleep in the Cathedral transept, her calm classic face framed in



its waved hair. She had shown him the photograph once, and he had found it enchanting, but they had disputed over the curly-tailed dog at her feet, Clare maintaining that it was a symbol of conjugal fidelity, he insisting that it was merely the portrait of her pet toutou. All these and similar recollections passed through her mind as she strolled back to the house, and instead of profiting by her solitude to start work, she threw herself into an armchair by the window of the library, lighted a cigarette, and gave herself up to the sorrowful pleasures of retrospection.

The library was connected with the study by a low archway and was furnished in the Italian style. There were high-backed chairs with fringed cushions of crimson velvet, with lions' heads for arms and lions' claws for feet; there were marriage coffers painted with Triumph Cars, and others with armorial bearings in gilded gesso; there were old Sienese paintings in their original frames, Madonnas and Saints in gorgeous robes of pomegranate-red and apple-green, gleaming with stamped gold and jewels. All these things she had picked up herself in back streets and out-of-the-way villas and sacristies, and each had its pleasant association, recalling delicious days spent in company with the Maryx, exploring old

fortressed towns inaccessible to automobiles. This Altarpiece she had discovered in a wayside chapel near the lavender hills of Siena, that coffer in a princely villa now forsaken of its lords and let out in tenements to half a hundred peasants. Each chair and table was a souvenir of some charming excursion and historic spot.

The walls of the room were lined with books, and the greens, ivories, and gold toolings of the bindings made a harmonious background for the great green jars which were kept always filled with aromatic boughs of crisp-leaved bay and myrtle or turquoise-coloured juniper.

She lay back in her chair regretting her lost friends and half wishing she had accepted Mrs. Potter's invitation. Partings are always unpleasant, especially for those left behind, but she was surprised to find how much she missed them. As she shook the ash from her cigarette, she noticed in the silver tray a half-smoked cigar, left by Loutfi when Mrs. Potter had called to him that they really must start. He had been standing by her side trying to persuade her, with all his heart in his ardent blue eyes, to change her mind and come with them. The sight of it touched her with a vague tenderness towards him, and she began to realize that it was he more than



her old friends that she was missing. She was surprised and half ashamed, for it seemed absurd that she should regret a stranger whom she had only known for a week more than her friends of twelve years.

But in spite of her efforts her mind would keep wandering back to Loutfi. It had been so pleasant in the mornings when she gave him what Sibyl called his lessons. She had shown him photographs of all the great masterpieces, and he had bent his gold curls over them attentively like a good child over its books. It was the realization of her most cherished dream—this awakening of a soul, this sowing of seed in fruitful soil and watching the buds sprout and the flowers bloom. Poor Clare! She was herself so engrossed by the beauties she interpreted that she never suspected that her docile pupil in reality heard nothing but the music of her voice, and was all the time voluptuously enjoying her proximity. He delighted to sit near her and feel the contact of her arm as she pointed out the beauty of the paintings and statues, and he soon found out that he had only to keep a discreet silence to convince her of his interest. Not that the boy, with his hot Oriental blood, was satisfied with such Platonics. Unaccustomed to any sort of

self-control, it was all he could do at times to resist taking her in his arms and kissing her; but both Mrs. Potter and Sibyl had warned him that any premature demonstration of feeling would inevitably make her restive, and that his only chance for the moment lay in the intermediary of art.

Stump after stump of cigarette found their way into the ash-tray, and still she sat there musing over her departed guest with feelings she found difficult to analyse. She liked him certainly—better than she liked any man except Ferdinand—but the yearning in her heart was for the pupil not the man. He was sympathetic and charming, fresh and impulsive, like a nice animal one pets and cares for; but his chief interest for her was precisely that she aspired to humanize the animal, to inspire the vacant mind, to fill (as Browning puts it) the fine empty sheath with a sword.

The bells of an old lacquered clock chiming the hours recalled her to actualities, and she roused herself and went into her study, took out her papers and prepared herself for work. But after half an hour's vain effort she laid down her pen in despair, for instead of the intellectual faces of the Gonzagas she was writing about, she saw nothing but the buoyant Pollaiuolo head of Loutfi Sabaheddine.



"Dear boy!" she said to herself half-smiling. "He was just like a good schoolchild and I was his governess! How odd and how delightful that he should have cared so much about art."

Finding work out of the question and feeling restless, she ordered the pony-cart, thinking that she would drive to the hills above Settignano to see a Madonna which Ferdinand had spoken of as a genuine work of Botticelli. She would take her luncheon and eat it in the woods, and afterwards go to Castel di Poggio, for it was nearly a week since she had seen the Maryx.

In half an hour she was seated in the little dog-cart with Claudine lion-like by her side, turning limpid eyes of enjoyment towards her and sniffing the perfume-laden air.

The high-road to Settignano is an odd mixture of beauty and ugliness. To the right miles of vineyard and quadrangular allotments stretch to the river, while to the left the land is broken up into a hundred wooded knolls, each crowned with its ancient villa or castle, half buried in cypress and ilex. As they passed the terraced slopes of Poggio Gherardo, which tradition claims as the "little mountain, pleasant to the eye covered with a thousand trees and shrubs of tender green," of the Decameron, she looked up, and

with the keen visualizing faculty which made her life so full of incident, she saw as if they were actually there "the dainty youths and maidens pacing with slow step, weaving garlands and singing amorously."

The chapel containing the Botticelli lay high up in the great forest of Vincigliata, and as she drove slowly up the hill the *lieta brigata* of Boccaccio gave place to the gorgeous procession which Benozzo Gozzoli has painted on the walls of the Medici Chapel winding up this very hill. Her vivid imagination conjured up the gay troop of nobles and pages—the boy Lorenzo reining in his steed, the courtiers with hooded falcons and spotted leopards prancing behind. One of the charms of such day-dreams is that these historic personages, instead of holding themselves coldly aloof, as they probably would have done in real life, become one's most intimate friends, and her imaginary Lorenzo with his fresh face (something like Loutfi's) threw her a familiar greeting as he rode by, old Cosimo smiled benevolently, and the gay young angels nodded to her with charming affability. What a wonderful place Tuscany is, she thought, as the pony pulled sturdily up the cypress avenue, with hardly an inch of ground that is not immortalized by the genius of some



painter or poet, till each hill and path is peopled by some dainty and romantic personage of literature or art.

She found the little chapel, hidden like a classic temple in its grove of cypresses, examined the Madonna, tall and thin, with bent weary head like the Venus of the Sea, ate the lunch she had brought seated on a stone near a rippling stream, fed Claudine, who sat sedately by her side and ate delicately from a fork like a person, and when the sun's heat had a little abated, continued her ascent towards Castel di Poggio. The road henceforth was little more than a bridle-path, covered with loose stones and slabs of lichen rock, but the sure-footed pony clambered up it like a goat, and the little cart was made for such adventure.

She found her friends as she expected in the shady garden, and for a wonder she found them alone.

"How wise to come through the woods," said Ferdinand, as he came forward to greet her. "But where's Mrs. Potter and the Egyptian? Have they gone already?"

"Yes!" she answered with a little sigh as she jumped out of the cart and lifted Claudine to the ground. The little dog trotted gaily off, her noseless face close to the grass, her plumed tail

waved proudly over her back after the manner of her kind.

Ferdinand glanced at her quickly, for Clare was not wont to sigh, and they proceeded towards the tea-table which was set in a grove of cypresses peopled with marble gods and goddesses. Josephine, who had been comfortably installed in a hammock was making desperate efforts to get out of it elegantly.

"Stay where you are!" Clare called out sympathetically. "Getting in and out of a hammock is not a thing to be done lightly or often."

Josephine, who was built on a large scale, abandoned the attempt with relief, and Clare threw herself into a low deep chair and lighted a cigarette.

"Where's the charming Egyptian?" asked her hostess, who had fallen in love with him at first sight. "I don't think I ever saw anybody so attractive with his gold curls and pink cheeks. What a complexion for a boy!"

"They left to-day," she replied, regretfully. "And I'm feeling very desolate and lonely. I almost wish I'd gone with them."

Ferdinand glanced at her again as he handed her a cup of tea. It was evident that she was speaking the truth.



"Is he going back to Egypt?" asked Josephine, feeding Claudine with sweet biscuits.

"No! He's going to stay at Sibyl's house in Paris—as long as Mrs. Potter's there at least. She adores him and can't get on without him."

"He seems to follow her about like a toutou at the end of a string," remarked Ferdinand a little contemptuously.

Clare glanced at him with surprise, for it was not at all his habit to be abusive.

"Didn't you like Loutfi?" she asked with a shade of reproof in her voice. "I found him delightful—so fresh and unblasé. I loved showing him pictures. He had a wonderful flair for admiring the right thing and a genuine appreciation of beauty."

"Most of these Egyptians have!" said Ferdinand, dryly, "but it's a beauty more often to be found in the cabarets of Montmartre than in picture galleries."

"Ferdinand! What a brutal speech!" said his wife. "I never knew you unjust about any one before. I fell quite in love with him myself. I never saw any one so frank and open."

"Frankness and openness are not necessarily signs of virtue, but only of the absence of conscience," he retorted. "But don't misunderstand

me!"—as Clare opened her lips to take up the cudgels for her pupil—"I don't mean to imply that Prince Loutfi is vicious—between ourselves, I don't think he's got character enough for that—only that perhaps he's not very sincere."

"Not sincere!" echoed Clare, astonished. "What makes you think that? He seems to me to be the most sincere person I've ever come across!"

Now Ferdinand abhorred backbiting, but he had a reason for his condemnation which he had revealed to no one, not even to his wife. A few days before he had been in the smoking-room of the Tornaquinci Club, to which Loutfi had been introduced by Chetwynd, and was reading his paper in a corner half hidden by a large palm, when his attention had been attracted by hearing Clare's name pronounced in a fairly loud voice and without any prefix. He turned his head and saw Loutfi lounging in a deep chair, smoking a big havana and deep in conversation with a young man, dressed in the latest fashion so exaggerated that he had labelled him at once rasta.

He coughed to admonish them of his presence and even bent forward to salute the boy whom he had met at Clare's house the preceding day,



but Loutfi was too much preoccupied to pay any attention.

"Ah ! mon vieux ! She's superb !" he was saying enthusiastically, as he sipped a gin cocktail. "I'd like you to see her ! She bores me to death with her statues and pictures, but I support it for the sake of her beauty ! She's got a body like one of the goddesses she's always raving about ! Cristi ! I'd give something to see as much of it as of theirs ! She must be magnificent en Vénus !"

At this point Ferdinand's desire to horsewhip him grew so overwhelming that he had thrown down his papers violently and left the room.

He hesitated now whether he should warn her more openly that the young Egyptian was not so frank and guileless as she thought, but he detested gossip, so he contented himself with the above mild criticism.

Clare, unaccustomed to even so much from him, glanced at him severely. "How odd you are, Ferdinand !" she exclaimed ; "I never knew you abuse any one before ! If you've got anything against him tell me ! I hate innuendos."

They were friends of fifteen years' standing, and in all their intercourse she had never snapped him up in this fashion. Ferdinand was a

psychologist and knew what it meant. Kismet ! he thought. The little god who is, was, or will be, every one's master had got hold of his statue. And that being so the least said the soonest mended.

So he kept silence and left the two women to sing the praises of the fascinating Egyptian undisturbed.

But Clare could not forget the attack which she considered calumnious and cowardly. The fact was she had so much respect for Ferdinand's opinion, that, unknown to herself, his depreciatory remarks had influenced and made her suspicious. So after a few minutes she returned to the charge.

"Ferdinand ! How grincheux you were just now about Loutfi Sabaheddine. I wish you'd tell me what you have against him !"

He hesitated. Was it his duty to warn her more explicitly ? After all, it was perhaps unfair to judge him too severely. Young men talk so lightly to each other nowadays and chivalry is a virtue so long dead as to have become apocryphal. All his sense of honour revolted at repeating words overheard by chance, words which would never have been spoken had his identity been recognized. So he only replied, "One has one's instincts—that's all !"



"And yours are against him?"

"Yes!"

"But why? You must have some sort of reason!" she persisted.

"Oh, I generalize. You see I know something of these Orientals. They are very supple and rusé, especially in their dealings with women, and very unreliable."

"Oh, well! If that's all, it doesn't much matter!" she said, with an accent of relief in her tone. "I've no intention of putting his reliability in that way to the test."

"But you are going to see him again?"

"Yes, certainly! I'm going to Paris in a month or so to stay with Sibyl. I suppose he will be there still."

Then she turned the conversation to the Madonna she had just been to see in the little church, and before long took leave pleading an engagement.

When she was gone Ferdinand went to his study, threw himself into an armchair and sat musing for a long time. When Josephine came in as usual to remind him that it was time to dress for dinner, he said abstractedly, as though speaking to himself, "Who would have believed that a boy so weak and insignificant would have mastered a woman so strong!"

"What boy? What woman?" asked Josephine, astonished.

"It's the triumph of the flesh over the spirit!" he went on. "But I thought she, at least, was immune."

"Ferdinand! You don't mean that you think Clare is in love with the Egyptian?" exclaimed Josephine, with joy. "How delightful if it were so!"

Josephine never thought ill of any one and, like Rabelais, her theory of life was that everything went in pairs. A female without a husband was in her eyes as incomplete and useless as an eye without a hook or a keyhole without a key.

"She is unaware of it at present," her husband returned. "But only that could make her so blind. The boy is a mere animal, incapable even of appreciating her. If he is in love, it is for the moment only. In the long run her culture, her coldness, all that we admire in her, will infallibly bore him. God help her if she marry him! It is he who will drag her to his level, not she who will raise him to hers!"

"But why shouldn't she raise him, if she's so strong and he's so weak?"

"To raise there must be something to get a



grip on," he replied, "and there is about as much solidity in Loutfi Sabaheddine as in a flare of benzine."

And he went to dress for dinner, half regretting that he had not warned her more explicitly of the danger he foresaw.

CHAPTER VII

IT was nearing the end of June, and Clare had torn herself from the delights of the Schifanoia, and was sitting in Sibyl's salon, No 14 bis Avenue du Bois de Boulogne.

Like every other Paris salon with any pretension to be chic, the room was furnished in the "quinze-seize" style, which was her particular aversion. It was very bright, very gorgeous, but without the least personal note of its inhabitants, and suggested nothing but expensive upholsterers and well-paid labour. The white walls were stuccoed with the inevitable rose-garland (swag is, I believe, its technical name, but the pen shies from so hideous a word), which flourished likewise over every available surface of curtain, carpet, and chair-cover, and drooped in languid festoons from cornice and dado. A dozen huge mirrors reflected an endless perspective, while their bevelled edges fractured each object into a myriad fragments, like a painting of the Futurist school. From the ceiling depended cut glass



chandeliers with a thousand sparkling droplets, and from gilt cornices crimson curtains showered their silken folds on velvet carpets of the same tint. Tables and guéridons were of gold, carved with sportive Loves and prickly foliage, and fauteuils and bérghères were covered with tapestries repeating ad nauseam the same wanton pastoral. There were half a dozen large oval frames (containing pastels) on the walls, and scattered about the room Sévres vases big enough to hide Morgiana's Forty Thieves, china shepherds and shepherdesses by the score, alabaster Cupids and Psyches in equivocal positions, enough bibelôts to furnish a shop in the Rue Drouot, and—not one book in the whole room. Literature was represented in Sibyl's salon by *Excelsior*, *La Vie Parisienne*, and the *New York Herald*.

Now Clare, as became a serious artist, abhorred French decoration. To her it had neither comfort nor beauty, and produced no sensation but restlessness. The glare and glitter and endless reflections made her nervous, while the stagey scenery and smirking coquetry of the paintings and tapestries irritated her almost as much as the patterns of early Victorian woolwork.

She had arrived the preceding evening, and being desirous to write a letter and finding no

implements in either of her own luxurious rooms, had descended to the salon, where she was seated before a very ornate writing-table, trying to find room among the gimcracks for her paper and elbow, when the door opened and Loutfi came in.

"Ah! Here you are!" he said, in his fresh eager voice. "I've been looking for you everywhere! They told me you were in the garden. But I see you are writing, so I mustn't disturb you." And he sat down in the chair by her side with the evident intention of doing so.

"My letter isn't important," she replied, not displeased at the interruption. "Besides, it's impossible to write among all these bronze dogs and china shepherdesses! Look at this inkstand!" And she pointed to a large porcelain garden, brilliant with flowers, surrounding a minute fountain half an inch deep, clogged with a thick fluid which had once been ink.

He laughed. "Ah, Sibyl said you would abuse that inkstand," he said, lighting a cigarette. "But it's better than my mother's house, where if one wants to write a letter, they send out for a penny bottle of ink and throw it away when one's finished. But tell me what you are going to do this morning."



"I hadn't thought," she replied. "Where are the others, do you know?"

"Princess Sibyl's in bed, and Mrs. Potter has gone shopping. She wanted me to go with her, but——"

"But what?"

"Well, I wanted to be with you! Aren't you going to take me to the Louvre? In Florence you said you would."

She assented readily. "He really *is* interested in art," she said to herself, as she went to her room to put on her things. "Ferdinand was horribly unjust and suspicious."

As they drove down the Champs Elysées in a taxi-auto, with the reckless speed and disdain of life peculiar to the Paris chauffeur, she turned to him and asked him point blank, "Do you really care about art, Prince Loutfi?"

He winced, and his bright eyes looked a little guilty, but he answered readily, "Of course I care! Why do you ask?"

"You never get bored?" she went on, looking at him searchingly.

"I can't imagine being bored when I'm with you!"

"It's not a question of being with me," she said in a slightly irritated voice. "I mean,

don't you ever get bored with the pictures and statues?"

"Dear Miss Glynne, how can I disconnect you from them?" he replied, retrieving his false step. "You and they are inseparable in my mind, for without you I should never have known them."

She was only half satisfied, but the auto had already stopped at the Museum, and they got out and went up the steps. Before her favourite statues she soon forgot her suspicions, and discoursed eloquently on the Victory of Samothrace and the Charioteer of Olympia. As long as they were before those mighty works she was too absorbed to think of him, but when they went to see the Venus of Melos she became aware that his eyes were fixed on her and not on the statue.

"Why don't you look?" she asked a little impatiently.

"I *am* looking!" he answered, feeling like a schoolboy, and wondering whether he dared pay her the compliment which would have been the natural answer to any other woman.

She passed over the obvious lie indulgently, thinking that he was perhaps tired of the Antique, and led the way to the cellars reserved for the



Renaissance sculpture, pausing before the Slaves of Michelangelo.

"Sapristi! How beautiful!" he exclaimed, and she had a thrill of pride in her pupil, who, without a word from her, had recognized the sublime beauty of the statues. "What flair!" she said to herself complacently: "Ferdinand was certainly horribly unjust!"

However, it was not Michelangelo's superb athlete on which his gaze was fixed, but the marble bust of a young girl, with oblique almond-shaped eyes and languid head poised delicately on a long and shapely neck.

"How chic!" he said appreciatively, looking from it to his companion. "She's exactly like you, Miss Glynne!"

"Like me!" she echoed, disappointed. "Oh, no! She's like no one of our epoch! That's too glaring a compliment!"

"It's not a compliment, it's a fact!" he insisted, too pleased with his discovery to notice her annoyance. "Look! The features and shape of the head are just yours—only you are better looking!"

He stopped suddenly and added, "Forgive me! I've made you angry, I see! But I don't mind, for that cross expression makes you more than ever like the girl!"

And he looked from one to the other with a critical air which made her smile in spite of her annoyance.

"I thought you were a serious pupil," she said, "but I'm afraid Maryx was right when he told me I was wasting my time."

"Maryx said that!" he exclaimed, forgetting the bust and frowning heavily. "And what right has Maryx got to interfere?"

She was surprised at the sudden harshness of his voice and answered rather coldly, "Ferdinand Maryx is one of my oldest friends."

He muttered something in Turkish that sounded like an oath, and turned sulky and silent. He was conscious that she had begun to doubt his sincerity, and her words pointed to Maryx as the cause. He began to suspect that he was her lover, and had been trying to set her against him, for he belonged to the category of men—the majority—who cannot conceive of camaraderie between two persons of the opposite sex.

During the six weeks of their separation he had half forgotten Clare in the more facile female charms provided for such as he in the French capital, but the sight of her the evening before had rekindled his slumbering passion, to which the very difficulties in his way lent stimulus.



The atmosphere of Paris, charged with love (or what masquerades as love), had heated his blood, and made him less capable of self-control than he had been in Florence, and he was dying to pay her the broad compliments he found irresistible with other women, dying to open his heart and tell her he adored her. Her severity seemed more than ever abnormal and out of place here in the gay city, and he felt humiliated that she persisted in ignoring his love, and treating him like a younger brother. So he turned sulky, and wished all statues and pictures, and those of the Louvre in particular, at the devil.

They drove back to the house almost in silence, and Clare could not help contrasting it with their gay returns to the Schifanoia.

At luncheon Sibyl, who had been bored to death the night before at an ultra-respectable Faubourg dinner, where the talk had varied between fêtes de bienfaisance and the iniquities of the Republican Government, said to her mother, "Look here, mamma! Let's all go to the Abbaye to-night! I must take out the taste of that awful dinner, and you know you always enjoy a night at Montmartre, dissolute old woman that you are!"

Mrs. Potter's eyes twinkled with pleasure, but she thought it more seemly to demur,

"Certainly it's very gay at the Abbaye, my dear! But isn't it a little dangerous at this season? If we met any one we knew there it would be such a scandal!"

"Je m'en fiche!" her daughter replied. "Let's see! We shall be three women and only Loutfi to look after us. We must get two more men. I'll telephone to Chetwynd and Sandeau." (Sandeau was a passionate young poet who had celebrated his love for her in flaming verses.)

"Don't count on me!" said Clare; "I hate staying up all night. You know, for me Morgen Stund hat Gold im Mund! And I always get a headache next day."

"Clare, don't be so austere and spoil our pleasure!" insisted Sibyl. "If you don't come Loutfi won't either. Look at him trying to invent an excuse!"

"Nonsense!" she replied. "He wouldn't mind. He's furious with me because I gave him too long a lecture at the Louvre this morning."

"But I've forgotten your snubs!" the boy said eagerly, flashing blue eyes at her across the table. "You were a bit hard on me it's true, but please—please—come! If I thought it would



make you, I certainly would refuse to go without you ! ”

Mrs. Potter added her persuasions, so she gave in, and Loutfi went to telephone to Chetwynd and Sandeau, and to order that a table should be reserved for them at the Abbaye.

CHAPTER VIII

CHETWYND and Sandeau both accepted the invitation, and the first part of the evening was spent at the Châtelet, where they went into ecstasies over the marvellous soaring of Nijinski. It was half-past twelve when they arrived at the Abbaye and took their places at the table reserved for them in the large saloon. The supper was gay, and every one was in the highest spirits. Mrs. Potter had as usual insisted on paying for every one, and had deputed to Loutfi the ordering of the menu, and he made an admirable Amphytrion, arranging a light and delicious bill of fare, and never allowing the ice-pail to remain empty a moment.

Sibyl was in her element between her two pet flirts, each doing his best to efface the other, and scintillating brilliantly in consequence. Loutfi had placed himself between Mrs. Potter and Clare, and after swallowing half a dozen glasses of champagne began to grow a little boisterous. He



seemed quite at home in the place, and Clare noticed that he was greeted with effusion by many of the guests and most of the paid dancers, all which greetings he returned cordially.

She ate some chicken mayonnaise with good appetite, for she was hungry after the long evening, drank a glass of champagne, and then lay back in her seat, watching his boyish enjoyment with indulgence. However, she thought he had drunk quite as much as was good for him, and wondered what the result would be if he continued at the same rate up to half-past three in the morning.

The restaurant was crowded. There was not a table to be had, and several parties of tourists arriving late were turned away for want of space. The rooms were brilliant with colour, and the light, shed from a thousand pink and yellow flowers, caught the spangled skirts of the dancers, the glass and silver of the tables, and the jewels of the women, and flashed and glittered like the stars showered from a rocket. As the hours advanced, and the champagne began to take effect, the tumult and movement grew almost bewildering. The Spanish dancers, always vigorous, vied with each other as to who could make the most din, the women in gaily-flowered shawls clashing

their castanets frantically, the men in their velvet jackets and tight-hipped trousers, stamping their feet with demoniacal frenzy. Noisy parties of Americans, who had been making the tour of the cabarets, and had drunk champagne and liqueurs in each, were cheering lustily, joining in the choruses, and shooting little coloured balls at every one within their reach. The atmosphere was thick with smoke, and heavy with the fumes of alcohol and nicotine. Between the Spanish dances the tziganes were playing airs from Lehar's latest operette, and every now and then a clean-shaved American or swarthy-bearded Argentine would rise from his table, seize one of the bespangled dancers, and whirl her into the mazes of the One-step or Boston.

Men and women of every nationality were dancing there, each according to the fashion of his country. English and Americans turning correctly and soberly, Russians and Austrians whirling rapidly, Mexicans and Argentines holding their partners close against them, with white-gloved hand outspread on their backs. Not a civilized nation was left unrepresented in that most cosmopolitan of restaurants from the Indian Maharajah with swarthy face and black moustache to the broad-shouldered American with chubby



cheeks like a freshly soaped schoolboy. Only the Frenchman was conspicuous by his absence. Men, alone or in couples, in faultless evening dress, were looking on, so obviously bored that one wondered why they were there at all, neither eating, drinking, nor dancing, hardly deigning to notice the blandishments of the little danseuses who insinuated themselves upon their knees, pulled their moustaches, drank their champagne, and tried vainly to lure them to amorous intercourse.

A party of tourists at the table next theirs left, and their place was instantly taken by a girl in a large black hat half hidden in the plumage of an entire bird of Paradise. She was followed by a young man with pink rabbit eyes, a runaway chin and vicious expression. He had evidently drunk more than was good for him, and would have fallen in taking his place had not the girl seized him by the shoulder and roughly restored his equilibrium.

"Imbécile!" she exclaimed in a sharp exasperated voice, as though she was at the end of her tether. "Imbécile! J'en ai assez à la fin! Tu m'embête trop, tu sais!"

Loutfi turned and looked at her as she pushed her companion down on the divan and took her

place beside him, her eyes flashing with anger. She was like a Zuloaga painting with her black hair and eyes, her pale powdered face, and scarlet mouth from which the paint had effaced all except the broad lines. As she met his glance her brow suddenly cleared, the red lips parted over a set of marvellously white and regular teeth, and she made him an eloquent gesture of admiration, shrugging her bare shoulders with disgust in the direction of her cavalier, who was tipsily shouting to the waiters to bring champagne. Loutfi glancing at his party and seeing them all engaged in watching a tango which a couple of Argentines were dancing with much grace, bent towards her and whispered a few words in a low tone, to which she responded by a delighted nod.

Sibyl, like all her countrywomen, adored an occasional night at Montmartre, and she looked on at the brilliant scene, thoroughly enjoying its entrain, and returning with vigour the coloured balls which were aimed at her from all sides. Mrs. Potter was in her element, partaking with extreme relish of all the delicate dishes ordered by Loutfi, and beaming indiscriminately upon every one whether they belonged to her own party or not. Her enjoyment was so contagious that even Clare, who appreciated the Abbaye of



Rabelais more than its namesake of the Place Pigalle, was infected by it.

It was daylight when they emerged on the steps of the restaurant and got into the two automobiles which awaited them. Sibyl, though she liked to faire la bombe, preferred that her servants should not gossip over it, and on these occasions made use of hired autos. She and Mrs. Potter got into the first, and as it was very spacious, they insisted on dropping Chetwynd and Sandeau at their rooms en route, so that Clare and Loutfi were alone in the second.

Loutfi, after all his libations, was flushed and a little uncertain in his gait, but he looked very fresh and handsome in the dawning light with his red cheeks, gold hair, and sparkling eyes. The chauffeur, who had been asleep in his carriage, had also evidently indulged in more bocks than was compatible with steady driving, and after zigzagging half way down the almost deserted boulevard, finally came into collision with a heavy van full of vegetables, which was proceeding with Juggernaut stolidity towards the market. The shock was slight and little damage was done, and the chauffeur was already pumping up his machine to start on another zigzag, when a policeman laid an arresting hand upon his shoulder and pro-

ceeded to take down names and addresses after the manner of his kind. Loutfi protested vigorously in language more energetic than classic, but his remonstrances were received with official phlegm, and the interrogation went on more slowly than before.

The incident had sobered him somewhat, but his blood was coursing like fire through his veins with all the wine he had drunk. Clare, tired and very bored with the delay, was leaning back in the carriage with closed eyes, so that he thought she was asleep. She looked unwontedly pale in the dawning light, and the late hours had washed her eyes with black, which lent her face the sensuous languor of women less austere. He gazed at her boldly, devouring her throat, which her cloak left a little exposed, with hungry eyes, hardly able to resist his violent desire to take her in his arms and kiss her.

But Clare was not sleeping, and the cessation of the dialogue between the policeman and his victim rousing her, she opened her eyes suddenly, and met à-brûle-pourpoint the ardent gaze of her companion, which she returned with one of disconcerting rebuff. She deigned no comment, but drawing her cloak more closely round her shoulders, turned to the window and looked out



at the deserted streets, while Loutfi, half angry, half ashamed, relieved his feelings by abusing the departing policeman more vigorously than ever.

They had been delayed so long that it was half an hour after the others when they arrived at the house, and Sibyl and Mrs. Potter had already gone to bed. As they entered the hall a sudden ray from the rising sun struck through the stained glass window and threw a luminous crimson glow at Clare's feet. Attracted by the beauty of the morning, she opened the window and stepped out on the balcony, followed by Loutfi. The sleepy footman who had opened the door had retired, and they were alone.

He stood behind her silently as she leant over the marble parapet. All his veins were throbbing with passion, and his breath came hot and fast as he wrestled with his mad longing to clasp her in his arms. Who knows but what he might have mastered himself had not a malicious gust of wind suddenly blown aside the light tissue of her cloak and exposed her white shoulders in all their statuesque beauty. It was more than Oriental flesh and blood, unused to self-control and excited by Veuve Clicquot, could stand. He lost his head completely and pressed a long passionate kiss on the bare white flesh.

She turned round sharply, amazed at his audacity. She had been so absorbed in her contemplation of the sunrise that she had forgotten his presence, and the sensation of his hot lips burning into her flesh startled and infuriated her.

"How *dare* you!" she exclaimed furiously, sweeping her cloak round her. "How *dare* you touch me!" And she stood glaring at him like a panther at bay.

He thought he had never seen anything so magnificent as this statue suddenly animated, and for one brief moment he stood silent, watching her with intense admiration in his eyes. His audacity infuriated her more than ever, and she lashed out at him in no measured terms. "Insolent! *Mal élevé!* How dare you!" Then, seeing him flush and pant a little under the insult, she added with scathing contempt, "Go to your room, you are drunk!"

The sharpness of the rebuff stung him to anger in his turn. "You treat me like a child!" he said, returning her glare defiantly. "I'm not drunk!"

"So much the worse!" she retorted, more sharply still. "It would be the only excuse for your insolence!" And, drawing her cloak closely round the contaminated shoulder, she



motioned him aside imperiously and mounted the stairs to her room.

Left alone he grew instantly sober. Aman! What a fool he had been! After all his self-control, to lose his head and enrage her like that! She would never forgive that kiss! But what a beauty she had looked! God! He was more madly in love with her than ever now he had seen her like that! How she had flared up! How her eyes had flashed and her skin grown crimson! She wasn't such a block of ice then! And if anger could make her like that, who knows but what passion——! Ah! She was superb!

Then his mood changed and the recollection of her insults made him wince. What rubbish, after all! What were these Englishwomen made of that they pretended to resent love! Just as if they were not created solely for that! Hypocrites, too! To stand half naked in broad daylight and expect a man with blood in his veins to keep cool!

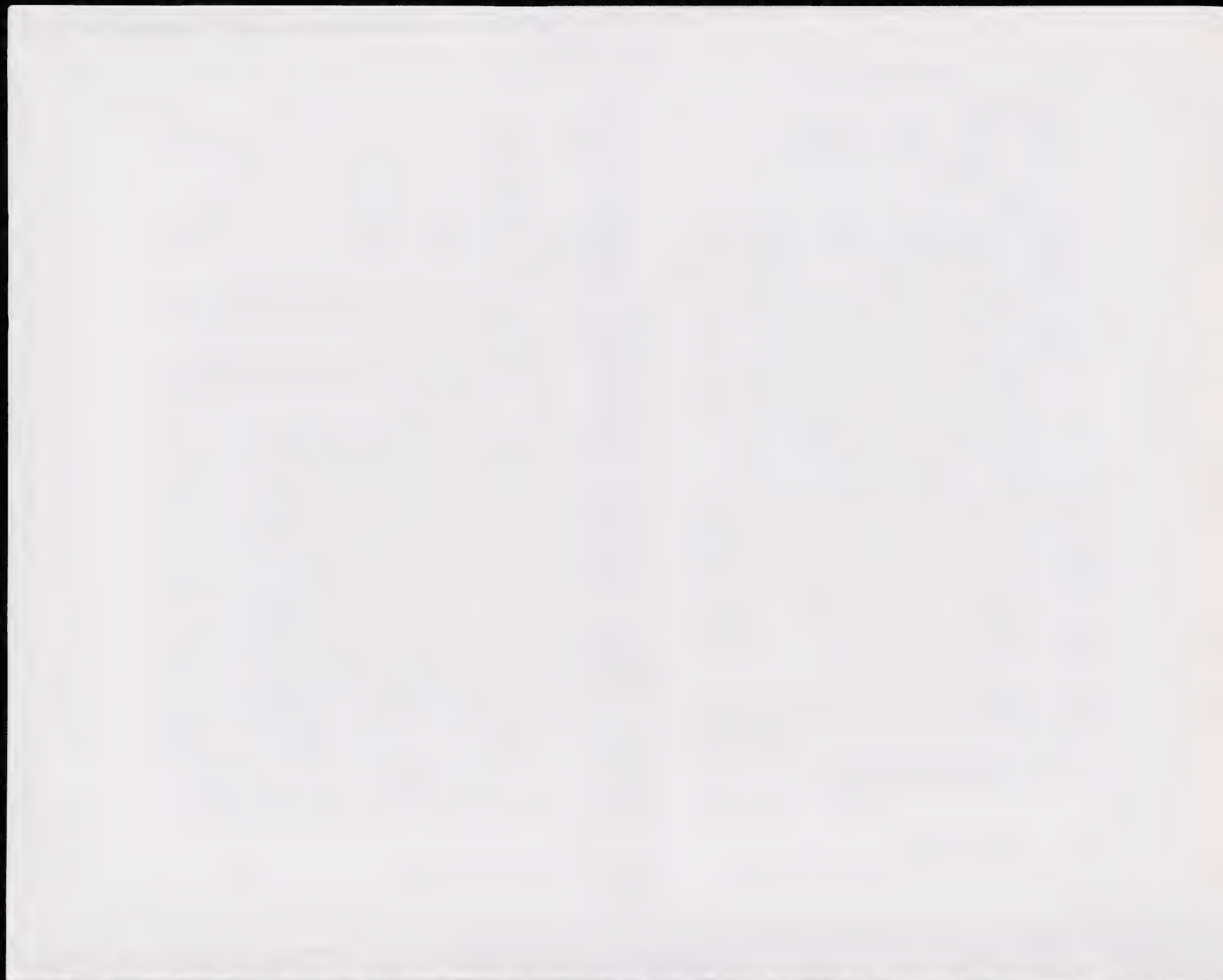
But the very fact of her coldness and difference from all the other women he knew made her the more desirable, and with all his anger and would be disdain he was more violently in love with her than ever. He longed to see her flash to life

again, even if it was only again to insult and abuse him. Ah! If she were like that in anger, what must she not be in love! The thought became an obsession!

He stood where she had left him, thrilling and trembling at the impossible vision his excited brain had conjured up, till the closing of a distant door aroused him to realities. His overwrought feelings found vent in his favourite exclamation, "Zut!" and he shrugged his shoulders, went up the stairs to his own room, undressed, and threw himself on the bed.

But sleep would not come to knit up the ravelled sleeve of his cares. He had never felt so wide awake in his life, and in less than ten minutes he was out of bed and pacing up and down the room. His head was throbbing, the blood beating like a sledge-hammer in his temples, and to stay in bed with his nerves in that condition was out of the question. He looked at his watch. It was not yet five o'clock, and he went into the bathroom and turned on the taps, thinking that perhaps a cold douche would calm and refresh him.

It quieted him somewhat, but made him less than ever inclined for bed. So he made his morning toilet, thinking that he would go for a



stroll in the Bois, since he was too restless to keep still.

Some of the servants were already astir when he issued from his room, but they were occupied over their work and paid no attention as he sauntered down the steps and out at the gate. He lighted a cigarette and walked down the Avenue, entered the Porte Dauphine, and continued straight on towards the lake. The place was deserted at this early hour except for a few milkcarts and one or two automobiles filled with belated tourists who had been drinking milk at the Pré Catalan, and he sat down on a seat near the water and tried to arrange his ideas. He felt thoroughly enraged with Clare now that the cold douche had partially cooled his blood. After all, what had he done that was so very atrocious! Was not a kiss a pardonable crime? If it had been Sibyl, or any other sensible woman, they would have taken it as a matter of course. Most women, he thought cynically, would, under the similar circumstances, have resented *not* being kissed! Clare was absurd with her austerity and exaggerated notions of virtue. He would forget her again, as he had done during the last month! After all, Paris was full of desirable women, and it was sheer waste of time to run after one with

no more warmth in her than one of her own boring statues!

As he sat brooding gloomily, aware that it would not be so easy to forget her, the throb of an approaching automobile coming from the direction of the Pré Catalan roused him, and a moment after he heard a woman's voice call out—"Arrêtez, chauffeur!" and then, more loudly, and evidently to himself—"Hé! Monsieur! Monsieur!"

He turned, and saw the girl with the pale Zuloaga face who had been his neighbour at the restaurant, leaning out of a taxi-auto and beckoning to him. He crossed the strip of grass that separated them and went up to her, and saw that the rabbit-faced Englishman was by her side, huddled into a corner of the automobile, nearly dead drunk and incapable of speech or motion.

The girl jerked her thumb at him with a gesture of intense disgust.

"Le cochon!" she exclaimed. "C'est écoeurant tout de même! I wanted to turn him out—the animal! but this idiot of a chauffeur insists on taking him back to his hotel—to make chantage, of course!"

Then she took a card out of the little gold sack in her hand and pressed it into Loutfi's



hand, saying—"It's been an awful night, but I intend to make up for it with you! Toi, cheri, tu es gentil! Viens—viens vite! Je t'attends!"

Then, taking his face between her two bare hands, she kissed him full on the mouth, flashed her superb Spanish eyes into his, and, calling to the chauffeur to proceed, she left him with the card in his hand and a smear of red on his lips.

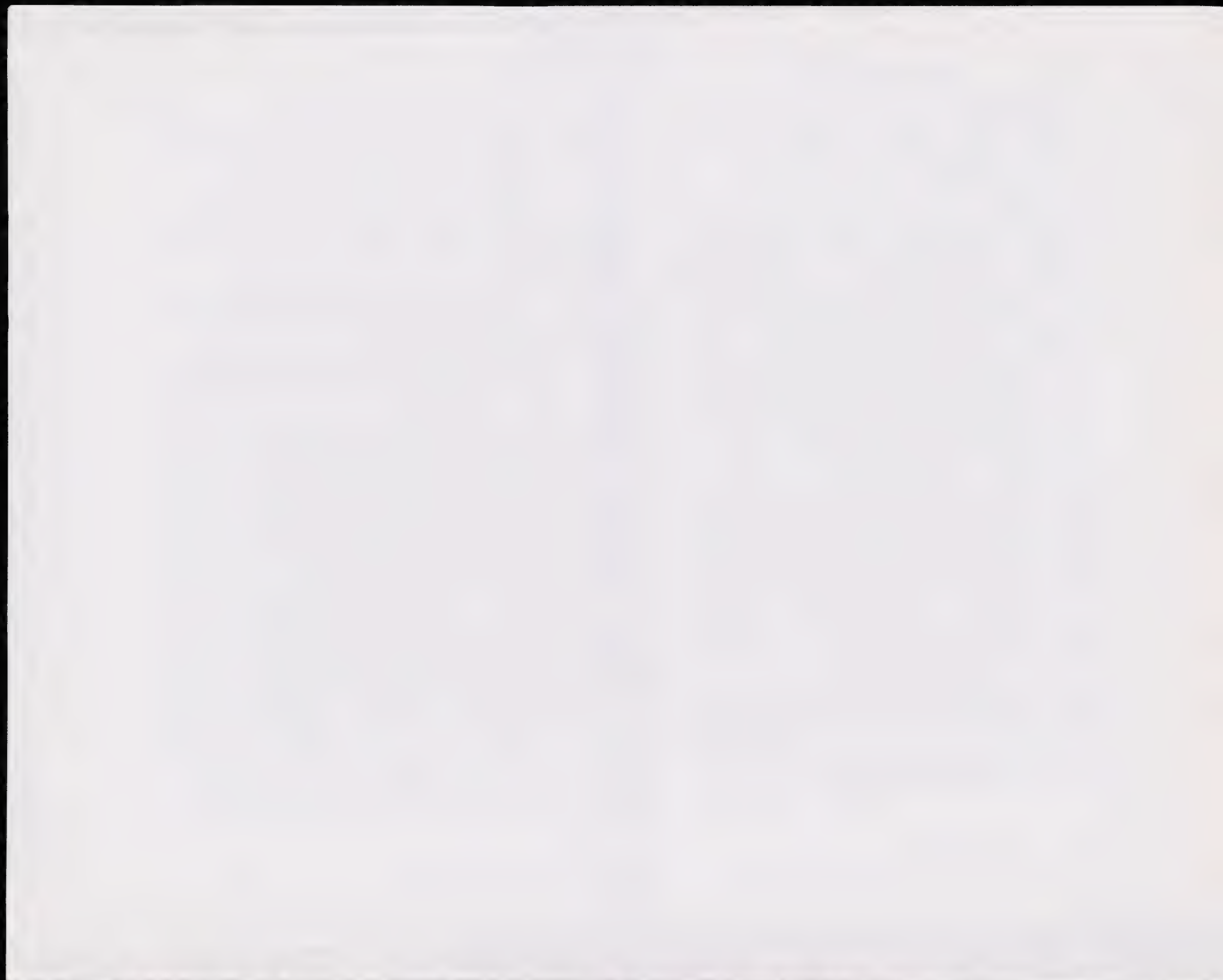
With a little cynical laugh he looked at the card, on which the name "Carmen de Castille, gobis, Rue Fourcroy," was inscribed in Gothic letters, surmounted by a nondescript but very ornate crown.

He turned it over absently between his fingers, his thoughts reverting to Clare and the fatal kiss, but in spite of his preoccupation, the pale face of the demi-mondaine kept returning to his mind. It was a type almost Oriental, full of passion and promise. She, at least, had fire, not ice, in her veins! And what a burning kiss she had given him! His lips were still hot with it! Should he go to her and try to forget Clare?

He felt for his purse. It was full of notes, for Mrs. Potter had stuffed it with money for the expenses of the supper the night before. After all, it wasn't a bad plan, even putting the desirable scarlet lips out of the question! If he kept away

from the house for a day or two and sent no message, Mrs. Potter would be mad with anxiety, and would make so much fuss that she would make every one else mad too, including Clare! She would imagine that he had done something desperate perhaps, and when he went back she would be so relieved that she would forgive him. It was a brilliant idea!

He looked at his watch. It was little more than six o'clock, and he walked quickly back to the house, went up to his rooms, meeting on the way only a couple of dusting housemaids, packed a valise with his evening clothes and a few toilet necessities, looked down the passage to see if it was empty, and stole noiselessly down the stairs. Luckily for him the servants and porter were having their morning coffee, so that the strange spectacle of the chic Prince Loutfi carrying his own valise passed unobserved. He hailed a passing auto, flung the chauffeur the address of the Elysée Palace, and jumped in with a sigh of relief. Arrived at the Hotel he engaged a room, ordered and drank a couple of whiskies and soda, altered his toilet, which was a little too careless for a visit, and sauntered out, a cigarette between his lips, in the direction of the Rue Fourcroy.



CHAPTER IX

CLARE'S first thought when she waked was of Loutfi. Oddly enough it was not so much anger at his behaviour she felt as remorse for her own. Poor boy! She had been too harsh! He was hot-blooded and impulsive, and had drunk too much champagne! She ought to have passed it over instead of snubbing him so fiercely!

So while she was drinking her morning tea she made up her mind that when she met him she would behave as though nothing had happened. He had drunk so much that he had probably forgotten all about it, and the disagreeable episode would blow over.

She glanced at the clock. It was already eleven. What waste of time! To sit at a table for more than three hours watching people make idiots of themselves, wake with a headache, and lose a whole morning! Certainly an odd sort of enjoyment—if any one really does enjoy that sort of thing! To “do” Montmartre once, as one

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of the sights of Paris, was comprehensible, but to go on doing it time after time like Sibyl—no!

She proceeded with her toilet, had a cold douche, and felt fresher and better. When the luncheon gong sounded she was the first to appear. Sibyl dropped in a few minutes later looking anything but fresh, and nobody else turned up at all. Mrs. Potter was shamelessly staying in bed with a bad headache due to much champagne and lobster-salad.

“I suppose Loutfi has a headache too,” said Sibyl. “After all the champagne he drank I’m not surprised.” And she sent the footman to his room to see if he wanted anything to eat.

The man returned a moment after saying that the Prince must have gone out as his rooms were empty.

Clare felt a little guilty, for she supposed he was ashamed to meet her, and her remorse grew stronger. After lunch she went shopping with Sibyl and to some receptions, and it was not till nearly seven that they returned. As the automobile drove through the gates Mrs. Potter was standing on the balcony evidently waiting for them. She was looking very anxious, and as soon as she saw them she called out, “Have you seen anything of Loutfi? It seems he’s not been



here since the morning. I feel so worried about him!"

Sibyl laughed. "How unreasonable you are, mamma! I suppose he's working off the effects of the champagne! He will probably come back for dinner."

"But the housemaid says she saw him come in at six o'clock this morning in his day clothes, and since then no one has seen him. It's very odd! I can't help worrying! I only hope he's not had an accident! I always feel nervous in Paris with these reckless chauffeurs."

Clare sympathized with her anxiety, feeling guiltily that she was probably the cause.

Loutfi did not turn up. The dinner hour brought as usual several guests, and poor Mrs. Potter was so upset with anxiety that she couldn't appear. Clare too was worried and distraite. She passed a very disturbed night, and when Irma, her maid, brought her morning tea, the first thing she asked was whether the Prince had come back. The girl answered in the negative, adding that Mrs. Potter was already dressed and talked of sending for the Commissary of Police.

She threw on her dressing-gown and went to her quickly. She found the poor lady agitated like a hen that has lost its chickens, fluttering up

and down the room, wringing her hands and crying, "My poor boy! My poor child! What can have happened! I must send for the police!"

"No, don't do that!" said Clare. "It will only make a useless scandal. I think I can perhaps explain why he went away."

And swallowing her pride she recounted to Mrs. Potter the incident of the kiss and her own rebuff.

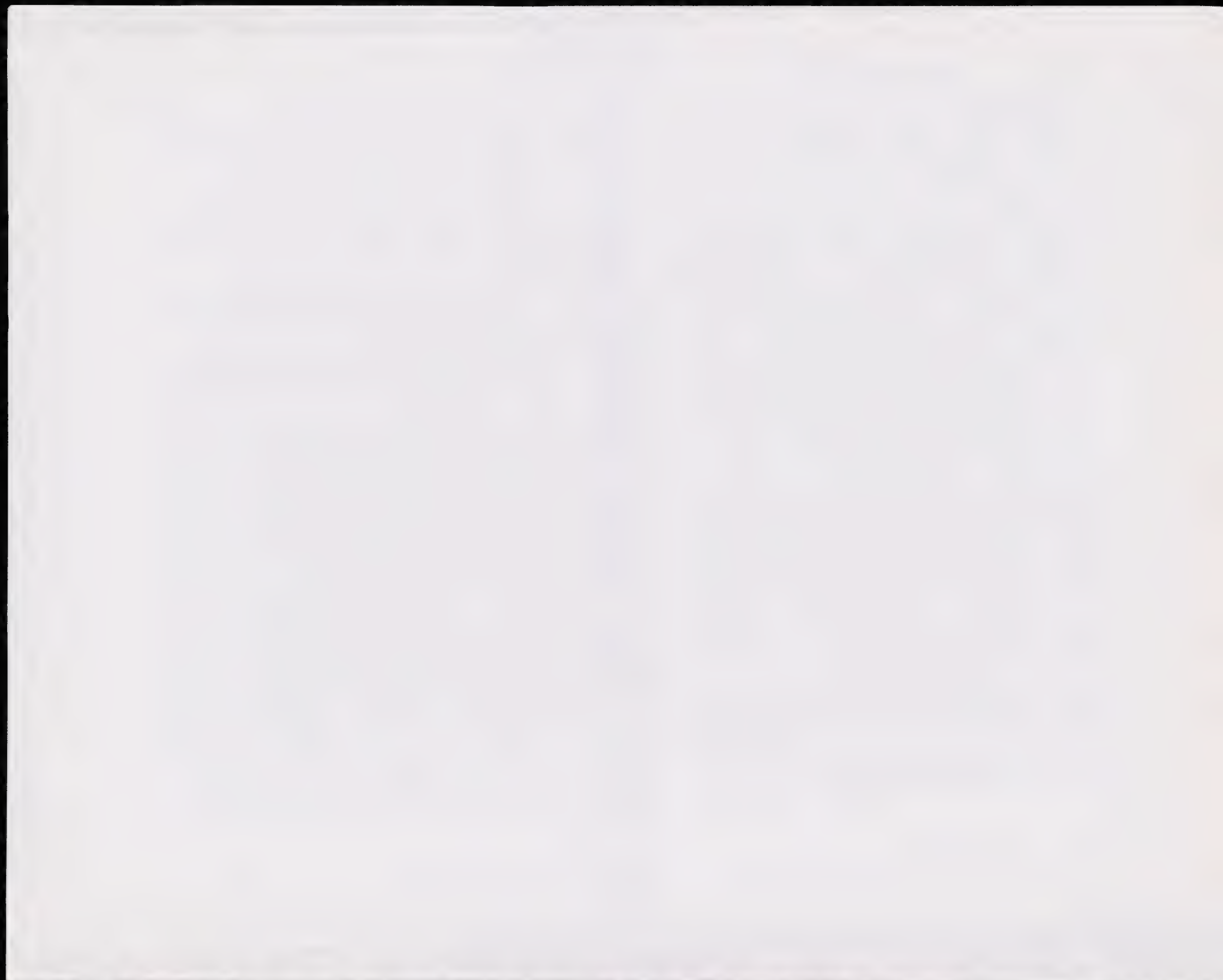
Mrs. Potter was not so consoled as she expected. "Certainly, my dear, that explains his not wanting to meet you, but why stay away all night, and without telling me? No, no! Something has happened to the poor child! I have a presentiment!"

Just then her maid brought in the morning papers, and she opened them feverishly, and glanced down the columns to see if any accident had happened which might be connected with Loutfi. Last night she had searched all the evening papers with the same lugubrious idea. To-day her worst fears were realized! The first thing that caught her eye when she opened the *New York Herald* were the words—

SERIOUS AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT

and breathlessly she read the following details—

"Yesterday the taxi-auto 321.G7, conducted



by the chauffeur Duval, was descending at an exaggerated speed the sharp incline between Saint-Cloud and Versailles, when one of the tyres burst and the machine swerved against a tree and turned turtle. The chauffeur lost consciousness, but was revived later. Of the two occupants, one—who gave her name as Madame Carmen de Castille—escaped with some severe bruises, and was re-conducted to her home by a passing automobile, the other,—a young, fair man, elegantly dressed (apparently a foreigner, but refusing to give his name),—was very seriously cut about the face and neck by the broken glass. He was taken to the nearest pharmacy, where the blood was staunched, and afterwards, at his request, to the Trianon Palace Hotel, where he had passed the night. He had lost so much blood that his condition is extremely critical."

"There! What did I tell you! It's just as I feared! Poor boy! Poor boy! He may be dead by this time! Lying in a hotel with no one to look after him! And that horrible woman—some one he picked up in the street, I suppose—going home and leaving him dying like that! What a monster!"

And Mrs. Potter's overcharged heart found vent in a torrent of tears.

"But, dear Mrs. Potter, there's no reason why it should be Loutfi!" said Clare, arguing against her own convictions. "However, if you think there's a chance of it we will order the auto and go at once to the Trianon Palace. I will come with you. I feel as if I were guilty—if really it is he."

In a very short time they were whirling at full speed towards Versailles, and during the half hour of the drive neither of them spoke a word. Mrs. Potter was so upset that she did nothing but sob, and Clare was blaming herself, and feeling that if the boy died she would never be able to forgive herself.

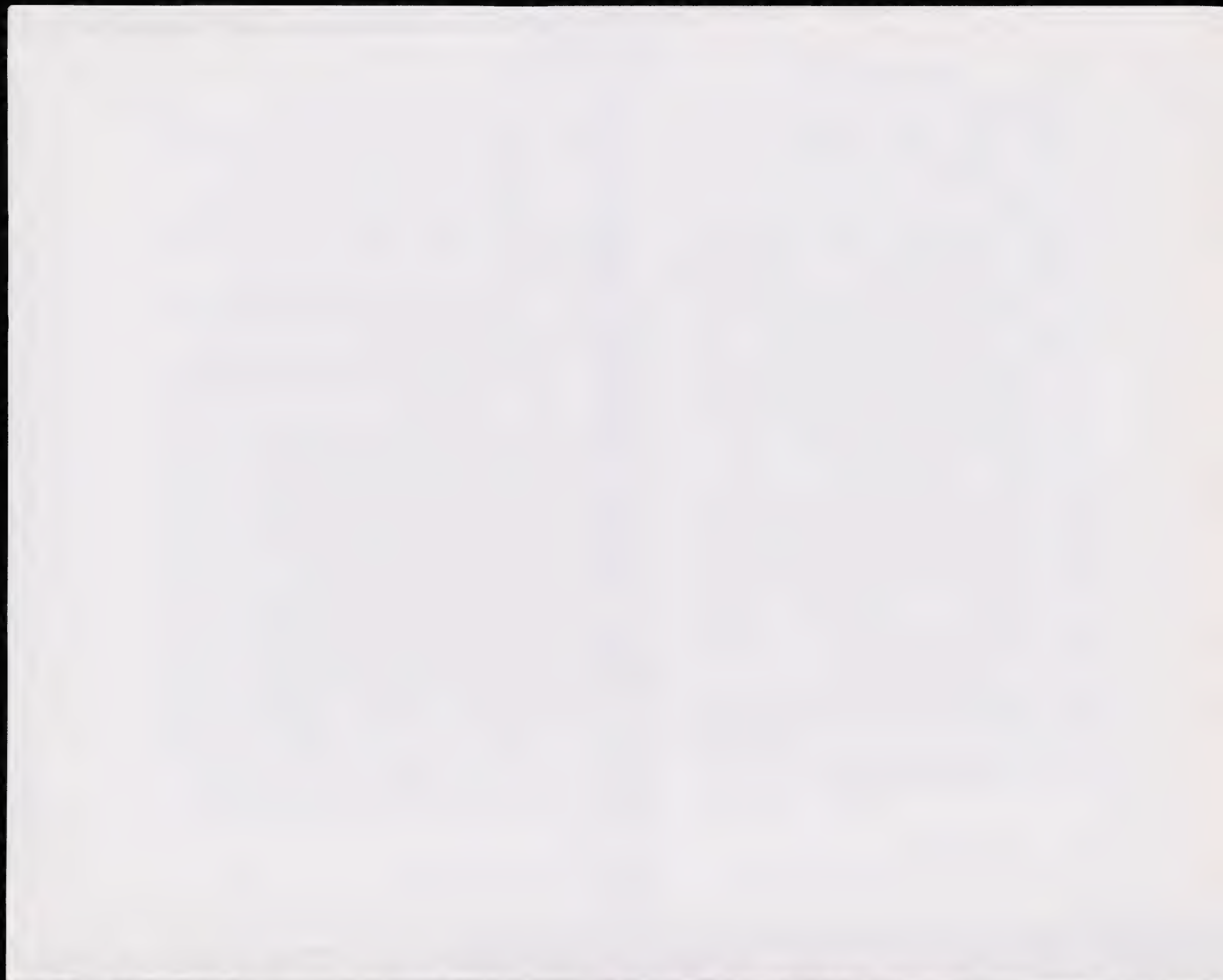
Arrived at the hotel, they demanded to see the victim of the previous day's accident, so sure that it was Loutfi, that they did not even ask his name. The director came forward and demanded blandly if Mrs. Potter were his mother.

"No," she replied, half sobbing; "but I stand in the place of his mother. Is he very ill?"

Her voice shook with the dread of hearing that he was already dead.

"To-day he is a little better," the director replied. "The doctor was here just now. He has a nurse and is well looked after."

Mrs. Potter gave a little sob of relief.



During the month he had been her companion, she had grown to love him almost as much as she loved her own daughter, and the thought of his death had been terrible to her. Clare also felt a heavy load lifted from her heart.

The garde-malade was sent for. "Can we see him at once? Is he dangerously ill?" they both asked eagerly.

She hesitated. He had lost a great deal of blood and was very weak. Any excitement might bring on fever, and the consequences might be fatal. But, perhaps, if the ladies would be very quiet and stay only a moment, they might see him.

They were ushered into a large double-bedded room, where Loutfi—for it was really he—was lying quite motionless, his forehead and throat so bandaged, that little but his blue eyes was visible. He was so weak that he seemed hardly to notice their presence, and had only strength to turn a lacklustre glance toward them and murmur very feebly, "How good of you to come."

"Don't talk, my child!" sobbed Mrs. Potter, kneeling down by the bedside and burying her face in the coverlet. Clare felt very tender, very remorseful, as she looked at the inert figure,

hardly recognizable for the gay, active Loutfi. She came closer and bent over him.

"Will you forgive my roughness to you yesterday?" she said simply.

A gleam of light passed into his dull eyes.

"It's you who have to forgive me," he murmured, almost inaudibly. "I behaved like an idiot."

Clare took the transparent hand that was lying on the coverlet, and pressed it gently.

The nurse, who was watching him attentively, now motioned them to go. He seemed completely exhausted, and made no effort to detain them, only his eyes followed their movements anxiously.

"You are going back to Paris?" he whispered feebly.

"No, no, dear child! Of course not! Not as long as you are ill," sobbed Mrs. Potter, dropping a hot tear on the coverlet. "I shall stay till you are well again, my precious boy!"

"And Miss Glynne?" he asked, still more feebly.

"I shall stay, too—at least till you are better," she answered.

He gave a sigh of relief and closed his eyes without speaking, and they left the room softly.



"My poor dear boy!" sobbed Mrs. Potter, when they reached the salon the director had provided for them, throwing herself into an armchair and giving way to her tears. "Poor dear Loutfi! he's dying, I'm sure! I never saw anybody look so weak and white! He was so strong and healthy and now—look at him! I would never have recognized him! Clare— isn't it dreadful—dreadful!"

Clare was silent. All the tenderest chords of her heart had been touched at the sight of the boy lying there, drained of his blood and vitality, and the feeling that she was probably the indirect cause added to her emotion.

Towards three o'clock the doctor paid him a second visit, and afterwards came, at Mrs. Potter's request, to her salon. He was a middle-aged man with iron-grey hair, cold grey eyes, and a cold manner.

"Yes!" he said, "he's had a narrow shave. He's lost more than half his blood. But he's young and healthy, and provided he has no fever, may pull through. He must be kept very quiet, however, and quite free from excitement— of all kinds!" he added emphatically, glancing at Clare, who had taken no part in the conversation. Then he enquired, still with his

eyes on her—"Mademoiselle is perhaps his sister?"

"No!" she answered, surprised at the question; "I am a friend of this lady."

"Hum—m—m!" grumbled the doctor. "Well, I repeat—and please remember, both of you—the patient must be kept absolutely quiet and free from excitement."

"I suppose there's no chance of being able to move him for some time?" asked Mrs. Potter.

"Ah, no!" he replied with decision. "It's out of the question for a couple of weeks at least. And you would be wise to keep him here till he's well. The air is purer in the country, and when he gets better he can drive out in the forest."

And with that he took his leave, darting another cold look at Clare from his steel-grey eyes.

So they installed themselves in the hotel, saw the patient as often as they were allowed, and Clare felt herself after each visit drawn more closely to him, pitying him for his extreme weakness and touched at the pathetic way his blue eyes followed her movements.

The first few days their visits were limited to five minutes, two or three times a day, but as he



grew stronger and the danger of fever diminished, they were allowed to remain longer. Mrs. Potter was even permitted to stay with her boy a whole afternoon together, but the doctor seemed to disapprove of Clare's presence in the sick room. He went so far, during one of his visits to their salon, as to ask her how long she intended to remain in Versailles, and when she replied that she meant to stay as long as Mrs. Potter, he asked her, with the disagreeable sharpness with which he always spoke to her, "Mademoiselle is perhaps the Prince's fiancée?"

"No," she replied, annoyed at the impertinence.

"Hum—m—m!" he grumbled as before, and taking his hat and gloves he left the room without even taking the trouble to salute her.

CHAPTER X

AT the end of a week youth, a good constitution and nourishing food had restored to Loutfi some part of the blood he had lost, and with increasing strength his love for Clare returned with renewed force. He looked forward to her visits with excitement, and had fits of intense depression when they were over.

"You stay such a short time!" he said to her fretfully.

"I stay as long as I am allowed," she replied with truth, for the doctor's orders were peremptory.

"Promise me you won't go back to Paris!" he insisted every evening when she came to say good night. And she gave him her word.

It was the first time he had ever been ill in his life, and the enforced inertia was very irritating to his active nature; but on the one occasion when he had attempted to sit up, his temperature had risen so high that the nurse had



insisted on his remaining in bed. His only distraction during the long day was to look forward to Clare's short visits. He thought of her always as he had seen her that morning, with flashing eyes, flushed cheeks, and panting breast; but to his distorted fancy it was love now, not anger, that fired her, and when she came near the bed, or touched his hand, or when the perfume of her hair and clothes—the Parma violets which had always intoxicated him—came to his nostrils, his heart beat so violently that the nurse looked grave, and imparted her fears to the doctor. The result was that one day he told Mrs. Potter that the presence of Miss Glynne was injurious to the Prince's health, and asked her whether it would not be possible for her to remain alone.

Mrs. Potter was vexed, and Clare was surprised; but they had perforce to obey orders, and the same afternoon she returned to Paris.

Before dinner, when the usual hour of her visit arrived, Loutfi, seeing Mrs. Potter come in alone, asked anxiously where she was.

"Well, my dear," replied the old lady temporizing, "she's had to go back to Paris for a day or two."

"Had to go back to Paris!" he echoed blankly. "She's gone back to Paris without

even wishing me good-bye! It's not possible! She promised to stay till I was well! Some one has sent her away! Who is it—I *will* know!" And he raised himself excitedly in the bed, his eyes flaming with anger.

Mrs. Potter was alarmed. "She will be back soon," she said soothingly; "no one has sent her away. She had to go to Paris on business."

"It's not true!" he cried, his face very flushed, his heart beating so violently that the coverlet shook. "It's not true! She promised she would stay, and she never tells lies! Send for her to come back at once—at once—do you hear!"

In his wrath his despotism got the better of his politeness, and he ordered his adopted mother as if she were a slave.

Poor Mrs. Potter did not at all resent his despotic tone, but was very upset by his excitement.

"But, my child——" she began.

"Aman!" he exclaimed more violently still.

"Some one has sent her away, and I want her back! I *will* have her back! I will send for her myself if you refuse!" And he raised himself in the bed and tried to reach the bell.

At the sound of his excited voice the nurse came in from the adjoining room, and seeing her



patient flushed, and apparently in a high fever, she motioned to Mrs. Potter to depart, and began to pour some soothing drops into a glass.

"Leave all that rubbish!" he cried, with all the force his weakened state would allow, "and telephone for Miss Glynne to come back at once! She has been sent away, and I *will* have her back! At once—at once—do you hear!"

Mrs. Potter looked at the nurse questioningly, and the woman shrugged her shoulders in grudging assent. "Very well, dear boy," she said soothingly, "I will go and telephone at once. Only do try and keep quiet."

"Tell her she must come at once—tell her that I won't sleep till she comes!" he called out after her as she left the room.

In little more than an hour Clare was back, and she went at once to his room at the express desire of the nurse, for the recalcitrant patient had flatly refused to take the narcotic she had prepared, and was waiting, flushed, rigid, and impatient, for his orders to be obeyed.

"Ah!" he exclaimed as she entered, with a sigh of relief and a visible relaxation of tension. "At last! But why did you go away? Somebody sent you, I know, for you promised to stay, and you never break your word,"

"That is true!" she answered, "but the doctor thinks it's bad for you to have too many people. He says you must be very quiet, and not talk. That's why I went."

"Damned idiot!" exclaimed the patient. "Look here, Clare! Don't listen to any one but me! I know best what's good for me, and I know I'll never get well without you! I want you so much!"

"And what you want you must have!" she said, smiling. "That's the one rule of life you never break, naughty boy!"

He laughed and lay watching her, Pasha-like satisfied that his commands had been obeyed.

"Look here, Clare!" he went on presently, "I want you to promise me you won't go away again—no—this time you must swear, because you broke your promise! Swear on the tomb of your father!"

"Silly boy, we don't swear on our father's tombs for such trifles, but I give you my word to stay as long as you keep quiet, and don't talk and excite yourself."

"Why don't you read to me?" he asked, "then I could watch you in peace, and you would be allowed to stay longer. They couldn't say anything if I were not talking."



She was delighted with the suggestion. It would be a splendid opportunity, she thought, for going on with her artistic training. Her old faith in him had been somewhat shaken, but she hoped that in his present weakened state he might be more amenable to influences.

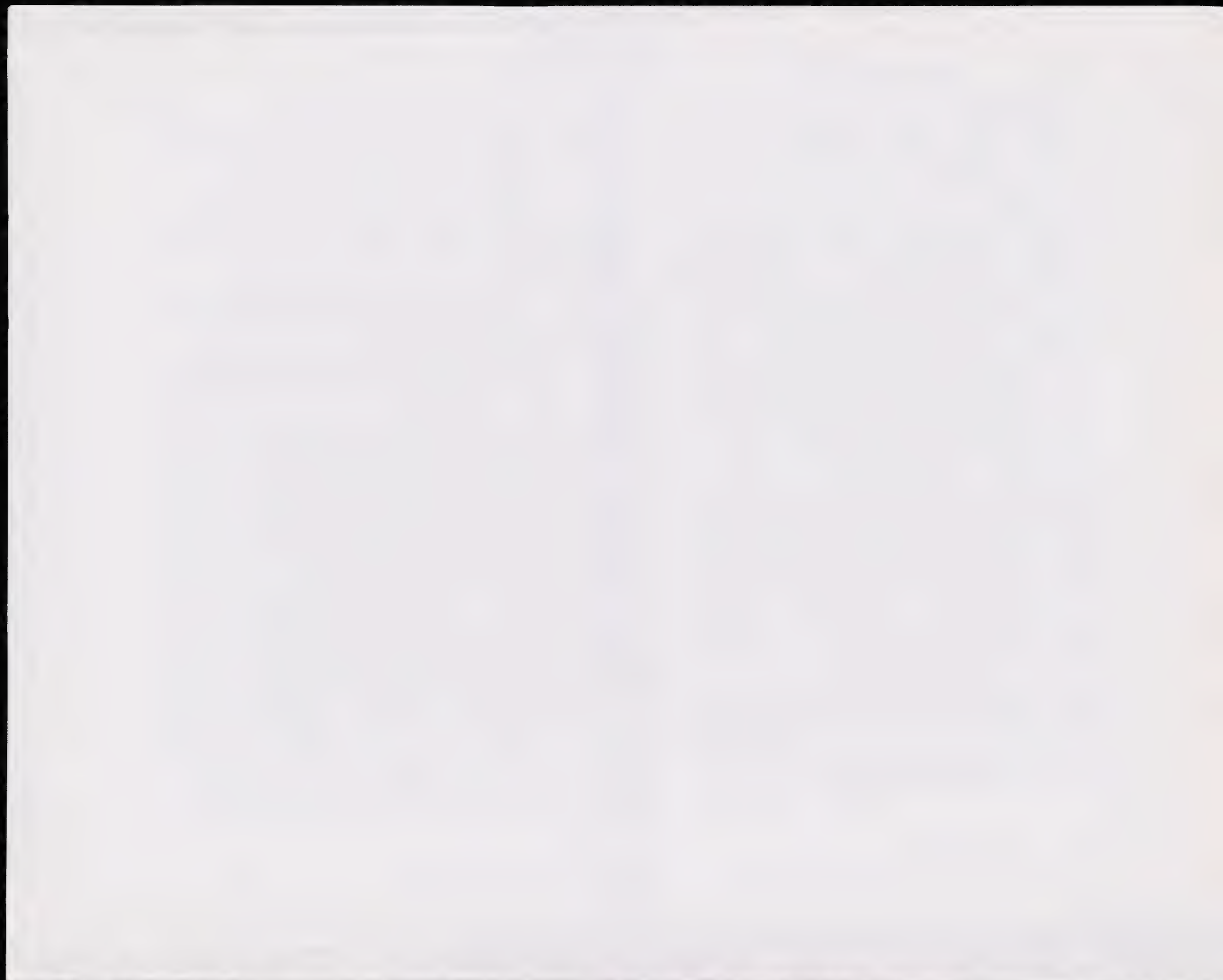
So she sent to Paris for some books, and read him little extracts of poetry and prose, bright dainty things which she thought would interest him and instruct him at the same time. He loved to lie and watch her face as she read, and when the poems had an amorous tendency he enjoyed hearing the love-words from her lips, shut his eyes, and tried to imagine she was saying them to him. He grew so much better, and more cheerful, that the doctor could say nothing against her visits, notwithstanding the antipathy he invariably manifested towards her.

Loutfi was growing daily more dependent upon her, and she was his sole preoccupation during the long hours of enforced idleness. While Mrs. Potter was alone with him he talked of nothing else, and she, good lady, ardently desiring to see them married, encouraged him eagerly. His weakened brain was obsessed with the thought of possessing her, and his enfeebled will left him with even less self-control than he

had before his illness. He wanted her—he must have her! That was his one idea—his one theme of conversation! Mrs. Potter must manage it—must urge her till she gave in—must threaten her with his relapse if need be! No matter what means she used so long as the end was obtained! His natural egotism, increased by illness, made it inconceivable to him that she could have the heart to refuse him in his present state.

But Mrs. Potter, much as she adored her boy, had a wholesome fear of offending Clare, so with characteristic weak amiability she temporized, promising him that on the first opportunity she would speak. Every day when she came to his room his first words were "Have you spoken?" To which she invariably replied, "Not yet, dear child, but I will directly I have the chance." And he would fret and sulk, or swear and rage, according to his mood and energy. It never entered his head to ask her himself to marry him, for in his Oriental code these were matters to be arranged by proxy, and since Mrs. Potter was too pusillanimous to broach the subject, Clare, though she was, of course, aware that he loved her, remained in complete ignorance of his matrimonial aspirations.

One afternoon she brought to read to him the



charming idyll "Aucassin and Nicolette," which had always been a great favourite with her. "You ought to like this," she said, as she drew the armchair near his pillow, "for it's drawn from an Oriental source." And she began to read in her low musical voice—

"Le damoiseau avait nom Aucassin. Il était beau et gracieux et grand et bien fait, de jambes, de pieds, de corps, et de bras. Il avait les cheveux blonds et bouclés menu, et les yeux vifs et rians, et la face claire et fine."

"How like him!" she thought to herself, glancing at the bed, where he lay with his blue eyes fixed on her. The bandages were modified now so that she could see his gold curls, which made such a charming harmony of colour with the turquoise-blue silk of his pyjamas.

She continued her reading.

"Et il était si doué de bonnes qualités qu'il n'en avait en lui nulle mauvaises, rien que de bonnes!"

"Ah!" she said to herself with another glance towards the bed. "That's not like, I'm afraid!"

Loutfi was as usual more interested in watching her and weaving his day-dreams than in listening, but as the story proceeded and she read of Aucassin's "très douce amie au corps

charmant," with feet so white that the daisies seemed black beside them, he began to find it charming, and when she came to the part where, after their long parting, the love-sick youth found Nicolette in her forest bower, and fell from his horse fainting with rapture till she revived him with a kiss, he heaved a deep sigh. She stopped her reading, and looking up saw that his face was flushed, and that the coverlet was vibrating with the throbbing of his heart.

"What an idiot I am!" she thought. "The doctor said he was not to be excited!" And she closed the book and got up.

"Why do you stop?" he asked. "I like this better than anything you've read to me. Go on, please!"

"Dear boy!" she said, standing over him. "It's getting late now and you ought to sleep a bit."

"Wait a moment," he said, glancing at her feverishly, "I want to ask you something."

"What is it?" she questioned, watching the deepening flush on his face with inquietude.

"Look here, Clare! Don't you think you might—like Nicolette—kiss me? I think it would cure me like it did Aucassin."

She blamed herself more than ever for choosing



such exciting literature, and answered a little severely, "Loutfi, don't be so silly! If you talk like that I shall have to give up reading to you."

"But why?" he insisted, defiantly. "You read about it as if you liked it—why not do it?"

She could not help smiling in spite of her vexation. It was certainly true, and she herself could not satisfactorily explain the inconsistency.

"Won't you kiss me?" he asked again, emboldened by her smile.

"No, dear boy!" she replied, gently, her own aversion to kissing him strengthened by the fear of increasing his excitement. "Don't ask such foolish things."

He frowned heavily, and turned away from her with his face to the wall, sulking like a naughty child, and all her efforts to restore him to good humour were fruitless. He refused to speak, shut his eyes and pretended to ignore her presence, until finally she called the nurse, and bidding him good night, left the room.

CHAPTER XI

LOUTFI had a temperature all the next day, and the doctor looked grave when he came to the salon after his second visit. He asked whether anything had occurred to annoy or excite his patient, and when Mrs. Potter hesitatingly answered in the negative, he threw a searching glance in Clare's direction, with his usual muttered "Hum-m-m!" She pretended to take no notice, but in reality she was feeling very guilty and embarrassed. She decided that for the moment it was better to suspend the readings, and not to see him except in the presence of Mrs. Potter.

The next day he was worse, and the doctor looked still more grave. "I cannot understand it," he said. "Something is evidently on his mind. Try and find out what it is, or I won't answer for the consequences."

Towards the close of the afternoon, as she passed the salon with the intention of taking a walk in the forest, Mrs. Potter called out and



asked her if she would speak to her for a moment as she had something very important to say. She seemed flustered and nervous, as though what she had on her mind alarmed her greatly.

"What is it, dear Mrs. Potter?" Clare asked, wondering what was the matter.

"You won't like it," the old lady began in great trepidation. "And I don't like saying it—that's a fact! But I can't help it! You must try and forgive me if I make you angry!"

"Tell me what it is. I can't imagine anything you could say making me angry," she replied, wondering what could possibly be coming.

"I'm afraid this will, however!" Mrs. Potter went on with conviction. "But I must say it for all that! You know the boy has had a relapse—a very serious relapse. His temperature is very high, and the doctor looks grave about it. He asked me this afternoon whether he was in love—and—well, of course—it's not difficult to put two and two together—he thought, as you were here—naturally—that it was with you!"

"Well?" said Clare, encouragingly, for Mrs. Potter's powers of articulation seemed to have failed her.

"It's very natural, of course!" the old lady repeated, wiping the perspiration from her

forehead. "Two young people young and good-looking together—it would come into any one's head——"

"I don't see that it's so very *natural*!" Clare replied. "I'm old enough to be his mother."

"My dear, don't talk such rubbish! You are only three years older than he, and what's that after all! I do wish——" She stopped again nervously.

"Wish what?" asked Clare.

"My dear, why can't you think of it?"

"Think of what?"

"Why of marrying him, of course!" Mrs. Potter blurted out, losing patience.

"Dear Mrs. Potter! The idea is grotesque! Even Loutfi himself has never hinted at so absurd a thing!"

"Not to you perhaps, because he's too afraid of being snubbed, but to me he talks of nothing else, and hasn't ever since he's been well enough to talk at all! That's the reason he can't get well, poor child! He's fretting himself to death about it. So I made up my mind that I would speak to you myself rather than let him die!"

"Die! But one doesn't *die* if one wants impossible things and can't get them!"



"Not when one's well and strong perhaps, but you forget that he is frightfully weak!"

"But, dear Mrs. Potter, be reasonable! It's too ridiculous! First of all I'm twenty-eight, and he's twenty-five. Next, I'm a Christian—officially at least—and he's a Mussulman. Thirdly, I have always detested the idea of marriage and always shall."

"But why should you detest it? He is very good looking, and has a great position, and he will be enormously rich some day. It seems to me in every way a suitable match."

"Ah!" she exclaimed in a vexed tone. "Don't let us talk any more about it please! My ideas about marriage were not made yesterday, and as for marrying Loutfi Sabaheddine, the thing is too grotesque to be considered for a moment! Even if our ages and other things were suitable, our temperaments and tastes are absolutely at war. It would be impossible to find two people more thoroughly unsuited to each other!"

"Not outwardly anyway!" said Mrs. Potter, who was wont to judge by externals. "And then you like teaching him things, and he worships you like a Madonna!"

Clare was annoyed at her persistence. "It's out of the question," she said, briefly and emphatically,

and to put an end to further importunities, she took her gloves and turned to leave the room.

But love of her sick boy made Mrs. Potter brave as a lion. She got up and laid a hot hand on her arm. "Oh, my dear! my dear!" she pleaded, with tears in her eyes. "Is that your last word?"

"Certainly it is my last word!"

"Then the boy will just die! He's fretted himself into this fever, and the only chance of a cure lies in your hands! You don't want to be a murderess, do you?" she added, looking at her tragically. Then, changing her tone, she added pleadingly: "Clare! You have a tender heart! Don't let the poor child die! His ghost would haunt you for ever!"

"But I refuse to accept the responsibility of his folly!" she exclaimed. "Has he no sort of self-control? The whole affair is too foolish—too childish! Loutfi must learn like everybody else that he can't have everything he wants for the asking!"

But the old lady persisted with tears rolling down her cheeks. "He's always been accustomed to have his own way, and now he is so weak! He will fret himself into his grave if you refuse!"

"So you expect me to sacrifice my whole life



and happiness to satisfy the whim of a capricious child?" she said, revolted. "Really, Mrs. Potter, you give him too much importance, and me too little!"

Mrs. Potter sobbed quietly at her angry tone, but did not seek to defend herself.

"I suppose now," Clare went on with a vexed air, "the only thing left for me to do is to go away again—and for good this time! There's no other course open to me!"

Mrs. Potter gave a sharp scream. "Ah no! Ah no!" she cried. "You won't do that! You can't do that! It would be nothing less than murder! Clare! I beg you—I implore you! The boy would die at once! Please—please—don't do that!"

"But what can I do else! If I stay after what you have told me I take the position of accepting his overtures—of encouraging the absurd idea!"

"Ah, Clare! dear child! I beg you—I implore you—don't go! It will kill him and me too!" And quite overcome by her emotions, Mrs. Potter buried her wet face in her handkerchief and sobbed desperately.

Clare was more embarrassed than she had ever been in her life. When Loutfi had made

love to her and wanted to kiss her, she had looked upon it as the natural exuberance of youth, and had never dreamed that the idea of marrying her would enter his head. Her surprise and annoyance were intense, but she was touched by Mrs. Potter's misery and the critical condition of the boy, and finally consented to stay, on the understanding that Loutfi should be discouraged from all thought of marriage, and that as soon as he was in a fit state, he should be made to comprehend clearly that she would never entertain so grotesque an idea.

Mrs. Potter, terrified at her threat of departure, agreed pusillanimously to all her conditions, but without the slightest intention of obeying them. In the midst of her sorrow she half consoled herself with the thought that when Clare was familiarized with the idea she would relent, and she intended to comfort her boy with that hope.

Clare went out into the forest more worried than she had ever been in her life. In what an impasse she found herself! How impossible it is for a woman to make friends with a man! It always ends in this sort of melodrama—except perhaps with a few nice Englishmen and Americans, who have minds as well as bodies! To think that young Egyptian should have taken



such an absurd—such a fantastic idea into his head, and that she was expected to satisfy it! She was furious with both Mrs. Potter and him.

Cool air and reflection calmed her anger somewhat after she had been walking quickly for half an hour. She thought of Loutfi lying up there sick and fever-stricken, and her wrath gave place to pity. "He's such a nice boy after all! if it were not for this mania!" she said to herself. "So fresh and unaffected! And I suppose I was wrong not to foresee all this. I ought to have remembered that these Orientals look upon women only with one idea. But the very fact of the gulf between us would have made me feel safe even if I had thought of it.

"And what an impossible nature after all! Just like a spoiled child! To fret himself ill just because he can't get what he wants for the asking! Ferdinand said the Orientals had no self-control, but *à ce point là*—it's really incredible!"

Then Mrs. Potter's tragic cry, "You don't want to be a murderess, do you?" rose to her mind, and a sudden horror seized her. Was it really possible, she wondered, for the first time entertaining the idea seriously, that he *might* die if she refused? How horrible! How horrible! To go through life like Cain with the stain of

blood on her brow and the feeling that by her thoughtlessness she had crushed the life out of this young joyous creature, whom she might, but for her loathing of ties, have developed into something noble! A couplet she remembered reading when she was a child passed through her mind:—

"Kill not for pity's sake, and lest ye slay
The smallest thing upon its upward way!"

And here she was running the risk of crushing, not an insect, but a human being, with a soul begun at least to develop! It was a terrible responsibility!

She returned to the hotel and sent word to ask how Loutfi was. The answer was not reassuring. The Prince was slightly delirious, and the doctor had been sent for.

She put on a dinner dress and went out on the terrace, seating herself at the table where she and Mrs. Potter generally ate their meals. It was at the end of the long line of tables quite close to the entrance of the hotel, so that she could see every one who arrived. Mrs. Potter's maid came out with a message that she was to begin dinner without her, as it was doubtful whether she would come down that evening.

She sat through the dinner they brought her,



hardly eating a mouthful, her eyes fixed upon the carriage drive. Dozens of automobiles came and went, but the steel-grey limousine of the doctor did not appear. She sat on in her place feeling more completely wretched than she had ever been in her life, with the sensation that she was being sucked into the vortex of a whirlpool, and that all her efforts to escape the relentless current were vain. She never used to believe in Fate—Kismet—holding that our wills are free and our future lies in our own hands, yet here she was being pushed—driven—propelled by an inexorable force, into a path at the end of which she saw nothing but despair—forced against her will and conscience to do an act of which she entirely disapproved, at which every fibre of her being revolted—forced to marry Loutfi Sabaheddine because he was dying and nothing less than that supreme sacrifice could save him!

It grew late. The tables had long ago been cleared, and the waiters had retired to their own meal, when the doctor's automobile whirled up the drive. She remained where she was, almost alone on the spacious terrace, with the moon shining pale gold through the forest trees beyond. She sat there, smoking cigarette after cigarette, her face stern and set with a definite purpose.

Once she muttered as though she were arguing with an unseen counsellor, "If he says so I *must*—it will be Fate!"

Nearly half an hour passed and still the grey automobile stood at the entrance and still Clare sat smoking on the terrace. Then she heard the voice of the concierge calling to the chauffeur that his master was coming, and the man got down and began to pump up his machine. She rose and went towards the little gate that connected the terrace with the drive, and as the doctor came out on to the steps she called to him in a low voice—

"Doctor, would you come here a moment, please? I want to say a word to you."

He looked at her with his usual coldness, intending to tell her that he was too busy, but he was struck by her white rigid face, and following her slowly to the table stood waiting in silence till she should speak.

"How is the Prince?" she asked in a low cold voice.

"Very bad. His temperature is very high and he is delirious, I feared this fever all along if he were excited." He looked at her with keen disapproval, feeling sure that she was the cause.



"Do you know the reason of this relapse?"

"Ah, mademoiselle! That you can probably tell better than I!" he exclaimed brutally, surprised at what he called in his own mind, her impudence. "As far as I can make out from his wandering he wants something he can't get."

"And if he doesn't get what he wants is there any danger of his dying?"

"Danger of his dying!—with a temperature at 40! But of course there is danger of his dying! He has absolutely no reserve of strength."

She winced as though he had struck her in the face, but continued in the same cold passionless voice—

"And if he gets what he wants, will he recover?"

He hesitated. "That no one can tell for the moment," he answered, unwilling to pledge himself.

"But what do you think?"

"What do I think! Well, I will tell you what I think!" he said, furious at what he considered her insensibility. "I think that if the woman he cares for were not a block of stone, she would give him a chance for his life!" And he glared at the cold Englishwoman who, according

to his preconceived idea, was killing his patient by her caprice and cruelty.

She took no notice of his explosion.

"Thank you," she said after a moment's silence, motioning him to his carriage. "Forgive me for detaining you. Bon soir."

In that moment she had accepted the responsibility of the life forced upon her by destiny.

"Hang her impertinence!" growled the doctor, as he returned to his automobile. "She dismisses me as if I were her servant! Who is this Miss Glynne that she gives herself such airs and refuses such a parti as the Prince?"

Clare went straight to Loutfi's room and knocked softly. Mrs. Potter opened the door and started when she saw her white set face. She looked really like a marble statue as she stood there in her white clinging dress, staring straight before her with unseeing eyes. She passed into the room without a word, and went straight to the bed with the mechanical step of a sleep-walker. Loutfi was tossing and turning restlessly in spite of the morphia the doctor had injected. He was very flushed—as red as he had been on that fatal morning of the Abbaye, only his gold hair was no longer crisp and curly, but lay in damp strands on his forehead. His



eyes were brilliant with fever, the pupils so dilated that they looked almost black. He was staring straight before him, and she heard him mutter her name repeatedly between his teeth.

She bent over him with a gesture so solemn as to be almost sacerdotal, and putting her face close to his called in a low clear voice as if she were speaking to some one at a distance—"Loutfi! Loutfi!"

He stopped muttering and drew in his breath, then turned his face vaguely as though he were listening to some far-off sound, and the thin fingers which had been plucking at the coverlet relaxed their hold.

"Loutfi!" she called again.

There was a convulsive movement of the throat as though he were trying to swallow, and his eyes lost their vague look and grew more concentrated.

"Loutfi!" she said the third time, putting her hand on his burning forehead.

This time the call brought back his scattered senses. He shivered a little and asked feebly—"Yes—what is it?"

"Do you understand what I say?" she asked, her hand still on his forehead.

"Yes," he answered in a voice scarcely audible.

She bent over him and said with the same sacramental manner as though she were performing some religious rite. "Loutfi! Listen! I will marry you if you wish."

He was so weak that the meaning of her words did not for a moment penetrate his clouded brain, but he gazed up as though trying to collect his scattered faculties. The sight of her face above him seemed to restore his consciousness.

"You say—you say——" he stammered.

"I say that I will marry you if you wish. I promise you."

A gleam of intelligence passed into his eyes, but died out almost immediately. He uttered a faint moaning sound and closed his eyes.

He remained thus motionless for some minutes. Then she bent her face closer to his and said: "Did you hear, Loutfi! I said that I would marry you."

His eyes opened suddenly, and a shudder shook all his frame. "I thought—I thought—it was a dream——" he muttered feebly.

"It is no dream. It is the truth," she said, in the same mechanical voice. Then moved by a sudden impulse of pity, she stooped and took him in her arms, and laid his throbbing head on her shoulder. The statue was melted.



"Poor boy!" she murmured in a voice infinitely tender, as a mother soothes a sick child. "It is true, Loutfi. I will be your wife if you wish. I give you my word. Now try and sleep."

The sense of her words penetrated his brain, and flooded his soul with happiness, but he was too weak to show his joy. He lay quite still in her arms with his eyes closed, but beneath the lids two large tears gathered and rolled slowly down his cheeks. Then he opened them, and looked up through the wet lashes at her white face bent above him, and a sudden gleam of joy passed into them.

"Is it really true?" he murmured weakly. Then he closed them once more and turned his mouth up to hers like a child waiting to be kissed. She bent her head down and put her lips on his with the solemn gesture of one who seals a fatal compact.

A moment later the overstrained brain had relaxed. The hot flush faded from his cheek, and with a long shuddering sigh of peace and happiness he fell asleep on her breast.

Mrs. Potter, who had looked on at the scene breathlessly, gave a low sob, and the nurse wiped her eyes. To both, though unpoetical, practical

women, it seemed as though they had assisted at some sacrificial rite, and the nurse, recounting the scene afterwards, said she had the same feeling as once when she had been present at the operation of transfusion of blood, and had watched the life flow from the veins of the mother into those of her dying child.

It was literally true. In that supreme moment Clare had offered up her life—more than her life, her ideals—that is to say, her immortal soul. Was it not a noble sacrifice worthy of Alkestis or Iphigenia?—grander perhaps, since they were sustained by love and patriotism, while she was bitterly conscious all the while that she was immolating herself, not to love so much as to passion and caprice.



CHAPTER XII

SO the die was cast, and the little god with pointed ears and goat's hoofs, who masquerades under the name of Love, had triumphed as usual. From the sea-bound Northern Isle and the sand-bound African oasis Fate had dashed these two together for their woe—beings so antagonistic that only one result of the collision was possible.

Clare Glynne, large of soul, grave of mind, cold of temperament, had linked her life to that of a boy full of caprice, light of nature, irresponsible, and ignorant of everything she loved. The gulf between them was impassable, cleft by centuries of self-discipline on one side, of self-indulgence on the other. The English girl had been trained, and her forbears had been trained before her, to curb the senses with reins of steel, a task not difficult when they monopolize but a small part of a life rich with the varied interests of a highly-cultured brain. But with the Egyptian it was different. His mind was like an untilled

FIRE AND FROST

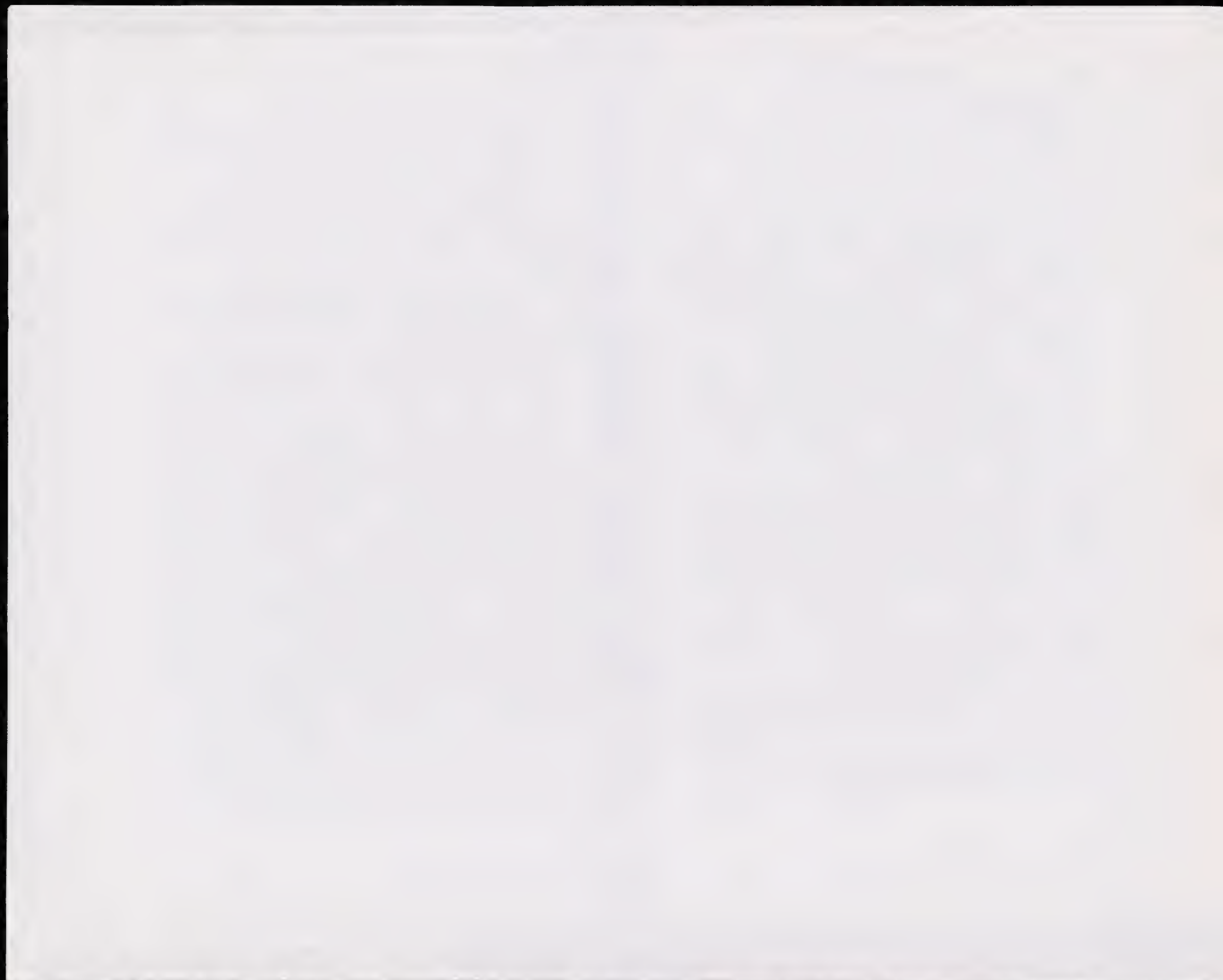
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field, where weeds had run riot and choked the few flowers sown there.

From childhood he had been surrounded by slaves, whose only *raison d'être* was to minister to his caprice. The one good influence in his life—his father's—had been thwarted and counteracted by the tyranny of his mother, from whom he had inherited his despotism and instability.

When he was a child she—little more than a child herself—had encouraged and made a pastime of his baby vices, laughing till she cried when he rolled on the floor with rage, or bit the fingers of the slaves till they bled, or tore the laces of her gown with his teeth. From infancy up to the age of eighteen, when his father had provided him with an English tutor, he had never opened a book, and his childhood was passed in climbing trees, teasing the animals, and stealing and smoking his mother's cigarettes. When he grew a little older he would sit for hours with the servants and eunuchs, listening to their eternal gossip, cracking sweetmeats, and drinking coffee and raki, without saying or thinking anything at all.

When his education had begun his character had already taken shape, and the young Englishman who had undertaken it felt as impotent as Augeas before his uncleaned stables. His task

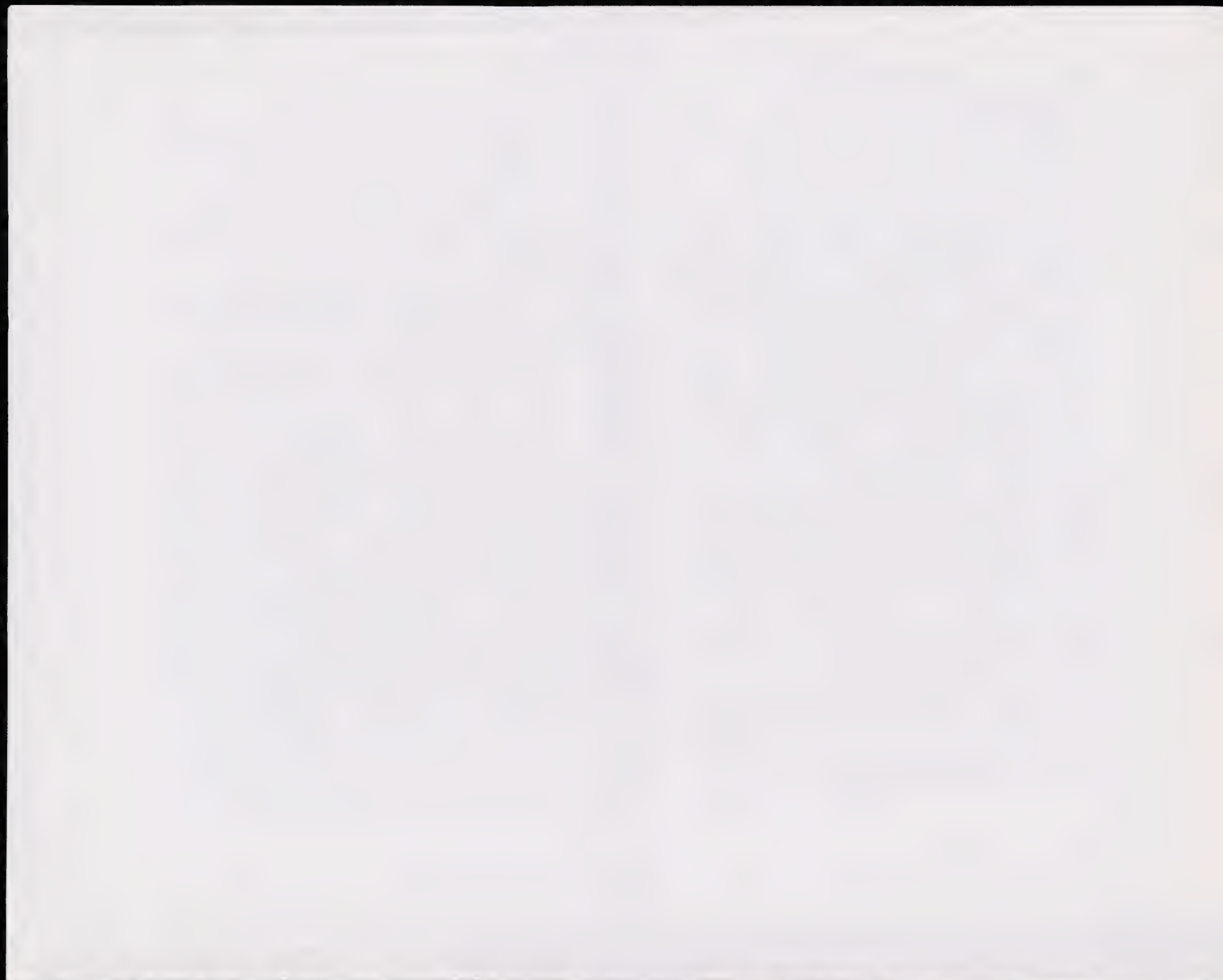


had been rendered more difficult by the enmity of the Princess Melek, who detested him as a Ghiour, and turned him and his teaching into ridicule before her son. Then came the military training in Vienna, where he became one of a band of youths, many of them his own countrymen, who had no idea beyond amusement. He learnt to ride, to dress, to mix a cocktail, and lancer a cocotte. He learnt to fence, to play baccarat, and lose his money with a good grace, but of any learning which would make him a mate for a woman like Clare he was completely ignorant. To him Art and all the noble things of life were sealed books—and worse still, books whose seals he had no desire to break.

Clare from the first had realized their absolute incompatibility of temper and temperament, but in giving him her friendship she had been misled by her own enthusiasm. Her vivid imagination had pictured him, with really fine qualities and unlimited possibilities, wallowing in a slough of ignorance from which it needed only some firm and sympathetic hand to withdraw him and plant his feet on the terra-firma where sense is dominated by soul. The thought of friendship had been sweet, but the idea of marriage had appalled her. Never had she blinded herself to the

inevitable miseries such a union must entail, and since what in her mind she called "the fatal night," she felt already that her wings were clipped. She could not accustom herself to the thought of Loutfi as a lover—much less as a husband—and felt ashamed of the position as of something ignominious, even criminal. But she had given her word, and she had in her to an exaggerated degree the English sense of honour. Moreover in her ideal republic, one soul was of equal value with another, and not to be played with or deceived. So with a philosophy born of despair, she tried to make the best of things and extract what consolation she could. Being, like all energetic natures, optimistic, she had not quite abandoned her old hope of developing his mind, making him love the things that she loved, turning him gradually from a lover to a comrade. Now and then even she had moments of happiness—of exaltation rather. What was more splendid than to win a soul for Olympus! The loss of her own happiness was little compared to such a gain! But these moments were rare in her lucid brain, and for the most part she pictured their future together as a vista of sorrow with despair at the end.

Loutfi, too careless and ignorant even to



appreciate the difference between them, intoxicated by his passion, and triumphant that he had gained his point, was thoroughly enjoying his convalescence. He was so weak that his caprices had to be humoured, an unfortunate necessity which paved the way badly for their future life together. The sense of ownership was strong in him, and he would send for her if she absented herself too long, insist on the satisfaction of every whim, and tyrannize over her already with the despotism of the Oriental husband.

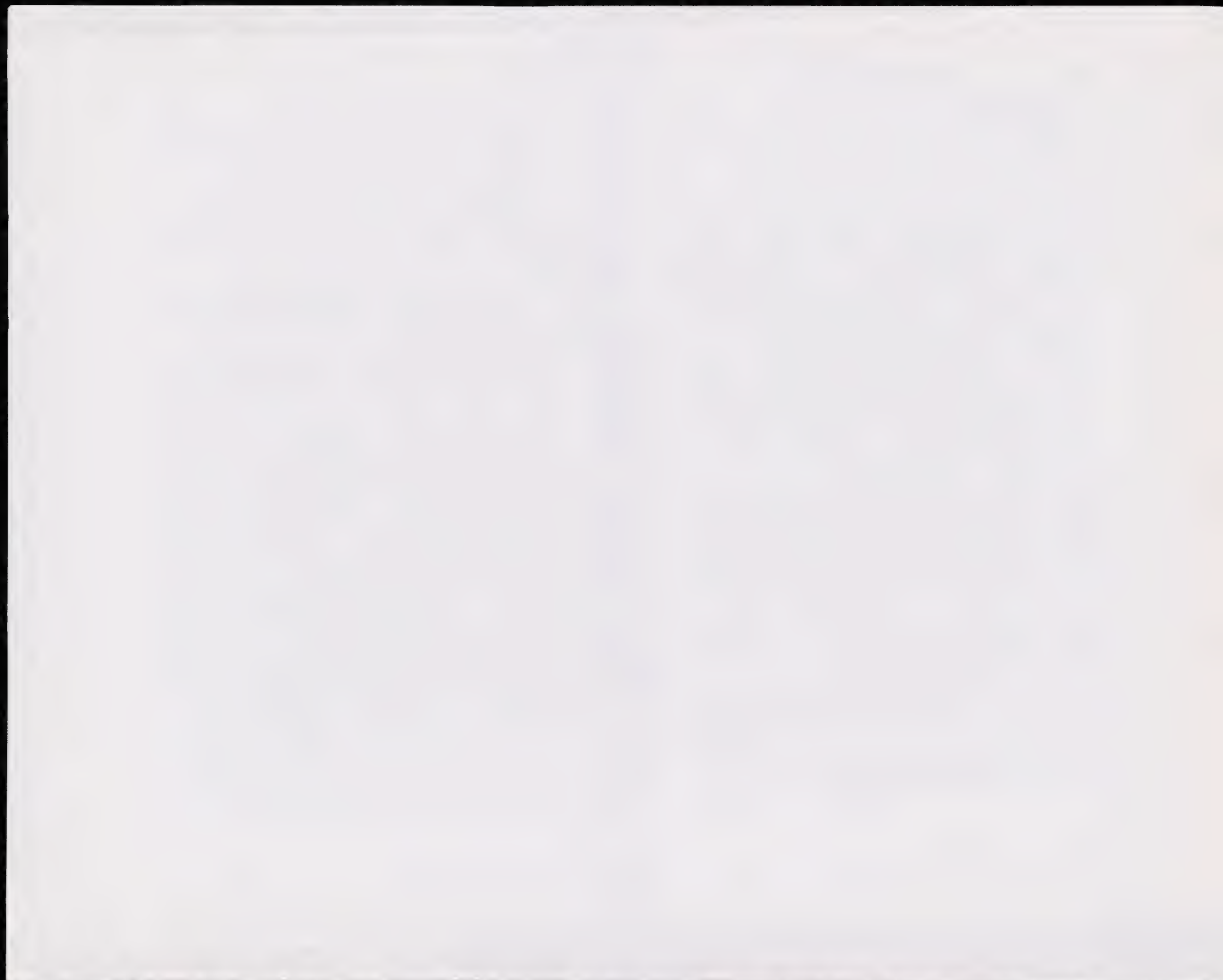
In his eyes Clare was a female, desirable for her beauty and charm, and all the more valuable for the difficulties of her conquest. She was the "apple atop of the topmost twig," the very struggle for which made him appreciate more keenly the possession. She had drawbacks certainly—she was cold and much too serious, and she bored him with talk of pictures, books and statues, and other insignificant things which are fit only for schools, and have nothing to do with real life. But once married to her he hoped to cure her of such rubbish, trusting that the larger life of Paris, where he meant to live, would help to stamp out these pedantries.

One slight convulsive effort she did make to save herself. It was the day after they had left Versailles and were back again in Sibyl's house. He was very weak from the journey, and was lying in a chaise longue near the window, and Clare was sitting at a table beside him turning over some large photographs which had been recently sent her from Naples. She was looking at the group of Electra with her arm round the Young Orestes, when Loutfi, catching a glimpse of it, asked her what it was. She handed it to him in silence, and after looking at it attentively for a minute he said—

"That is like you and me!"

She was surprised and pleased at his unwonted interest, and as the meaning of his words dawned on her a thought flashed suddenly like a gleam of light across her mind. Did he realize after all that marriage between them was monstrous?

Perhaps he was getting to feel that his attitude towards her was not entirely passion, but had something of the weak boy's trust in a reliable sister. Had she only guessed it before she might have gone to him that fatal night, not as an unwilling mistress, but as a tender and loving sister, have taken him in her arms and



lulled him to rest as Solveig lulled Peer Gynt, with her

"Schlaf nun, geliebter Knabe mein !

Ich will wiegen dich, ich will wachen !"

and who knows if the result might not have been equally beneficial? At all events before it was too late she must give herself that chance.

"Loutfi," she said gently, as he lay back on his sofa with his eyes shut, "what did you mean just now by saying that we were like Orestes and Electra?"

"Oh, I don't know," he answered, the transient recognition of her superiority already faded. "I don't know. It just passed through my mind that we were like that. I can't explain——"

"I think I know," she said, more softly still: "I think it struck you that we were more fitted to be brother and sister than husband and wife—wasn't that it?"

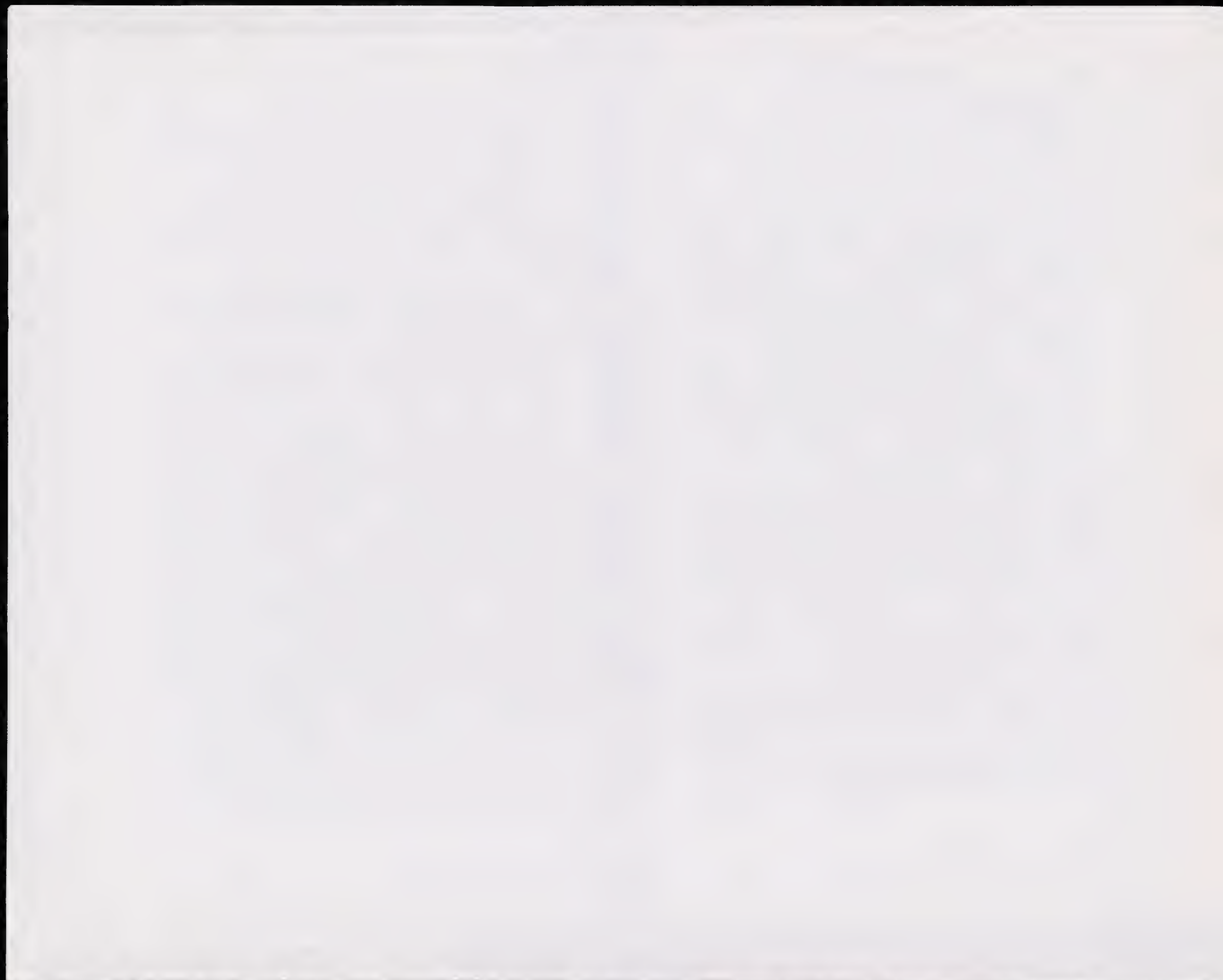
Before the words were out of her mouth he had sprung to his feet and was glaring down upon her with flushed face, panting and looking savage as a tiger.

"Ah!" he ground through his clenched teeth. "Ah! I've been expecting that! You are trying to get out of marrying me! I knew all along that you didn't care about me, but I

thought I could trust your word! Ah! You were deceiving me, were you! Well, by God—by God—I swear—if you don't marry me—I will—I—I——"

His breath came so fast that it choked him. His face grew more and more congested. He clutched savagely at his throat, tearing away his collar and necktie. Then, before Clare had time to recover from her astonishment, he had staggered and fallen forward in her arms in a dead faint. She caught him and laid him on the couch, rang the bell violently and sent for the nurse. Mrs. Potter came rushing in, wringing her hands with as much fuss and bustle as an excited hen in a poultry yard, and the whole house was in a tumult. After a few minutes the nurse succeeded in bringing him back to consciousness, but he looked very white and wretched.

When order was restored, and she had left the room, Mrs. Potter sat silent with her boy's hand in hers, patting it softly while an occasional tear rolled down her cheek. Clare sat by feeling very guilty and miserable at the unexpected result of her effort at freedom. Presently Loutfi, who had been lying back with closed eyes, turned his head feebly to see if she were there, and muttered between his white lips—



"Clare—say you didn't mean it—promise—promise—that you will marry me——"

"But of course, my own child!" sobbed Mrs. Potter, unaware of the cause of his collapse, "of course Clare's going to marry you! She gave you her word a fortnight ago!"

"Yes, but she's trying to get out of it," he stammered. "She's going to break her word——"

"No, dear boy, don't say that," said Clare gently, putting her hand on his forehead. "I only suggested—I thought that you—that we—but in any case I have given you my word and I'm not going to draw back. I promise you that I will marry you."

"Swear it—swear it by God——" he muttered feverishly.

She hesitated. The last hope was dying out of her heart.

"Swear—swear by God," he repeated with more energy, trying to raise himself. "Swear—swear—or I—I—will—kill myself——"

She saw the perspiration break out on his forehead and the quick beating of his heart shake his clothes.

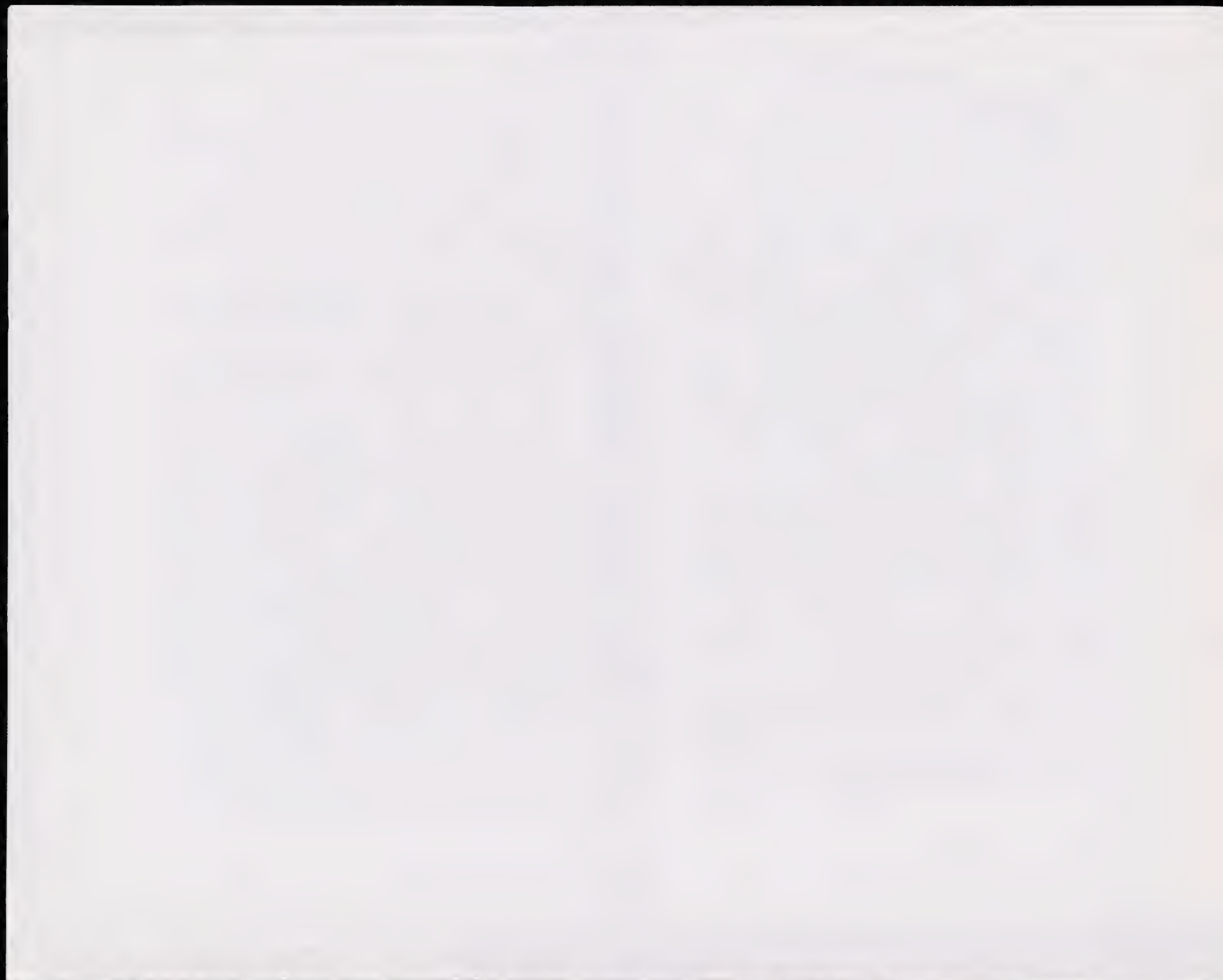
"I swear," she said in a low tone.

"That's not enough! Swear *by God*—do

you hear—*by God*——" he insisted. "I will believe nothing else!"

"I swear by God," she said solemnly.

And she felt as though the waters of death had closed over her soul.

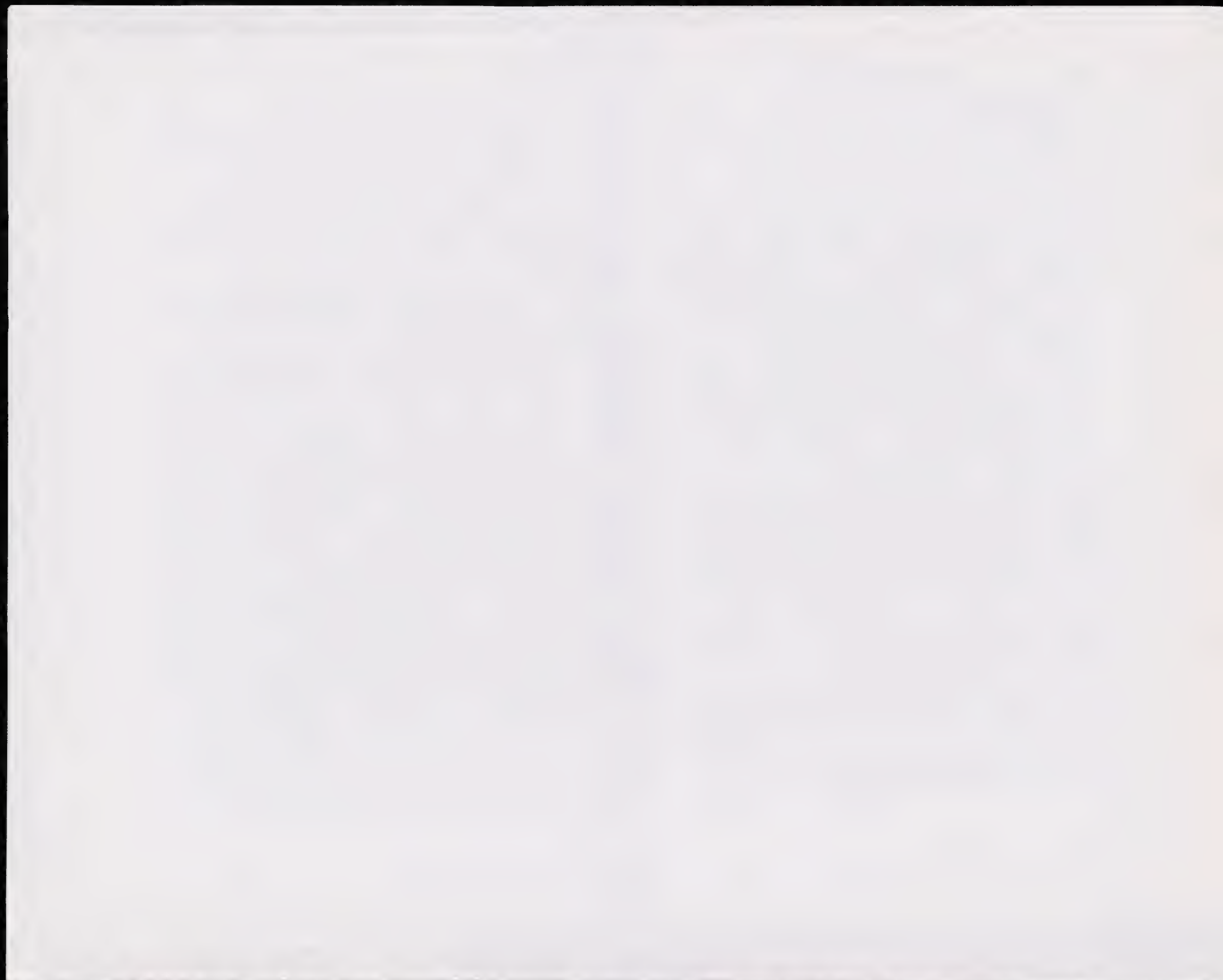


PART II



CHAPTER I

IT was the beginning of November. Loutfi and Clare had been married for nearly a fortnight, and were spending their honeymoon in Mrs. Potter's yali on the Bosphorus. Clare had done her utmost to postpone the (to her) evil day, but in proportion as she seemed unwilling Loutfi grew more pressing, till finally, worn out with his insistence, she had consented to fix the middle of October for the wedding. Her family had had a little shock of insular prejudice when she announced her engagement to a Mussulman, but that over they had recognized the worldly advantages of the match, which all their friends pronounced brilliant. Her sisters remembered that, after all, several women they knew had married Indians, one even a Persian—and the marriages had not turned out ill. As for her brother, now Minister for Foreign Affairs and more occupied than ever, his only thought on the occasion was that the alliance would strengthen British prestige in



Egypt, and he prepared to welcome his brother-in-law with open arms. Their consent was a mere formality, for Clare was independent and had no need to ask for permission even had she taken it into her head to marry a Zulu chief. Her sisters had a sharper shock still when they learned that the ceremony was to take place, not in a church, but according to civil rites only, with an additional formality at the Turkish Consulate.

"Why, it's no marriage at all!" they cried with Catholic scruples. "Really, John, you ought to insist on her being married in a church! It will be a public scandal!"

Sir John shrugged his shoulders with his usual indifference, and remarked rather cynically: "It will be all the more easy to break when she wants!"

But the scandal existed only in their eyes and those of the family priests. All London came to the wedding-reception and ate the fatted calves prepared in Portland Place, and many and rare were the presents showered, from Royalty downwards, upon the new Princess.

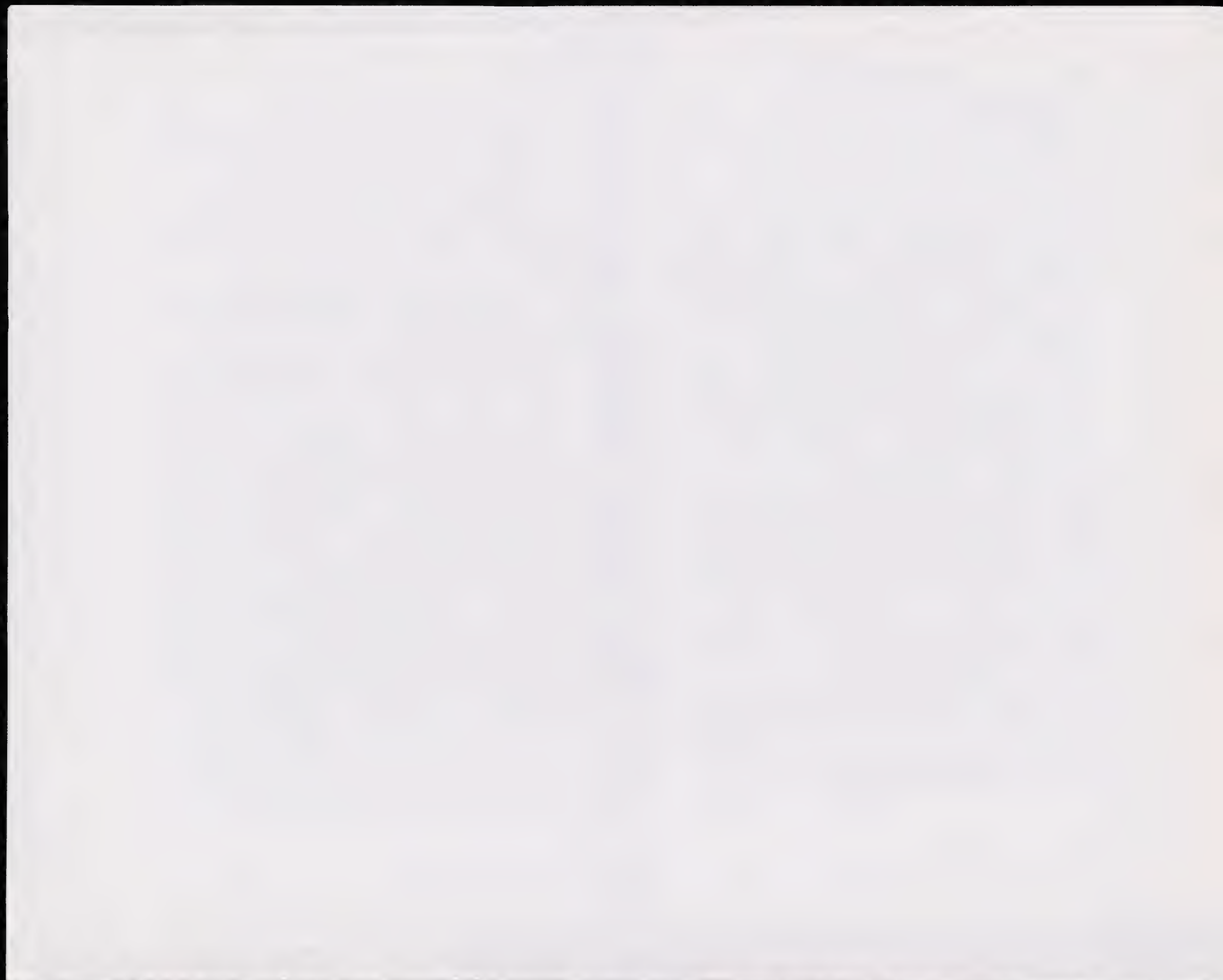
On one point Clare had been firm. Much against his will she had insisted that Loutfi should write to his mother and formally announce his engagement. Perhaps unconsciously to

herself her insistence on this point was the clutch at a straw of the drowning swimmer swept to destruction. If so, it had signally failed, for Loutfi did not at all recognize maternal authority. "I know my mother better than you," he had said; "she would die rather than give her consent to my marriage with a Christian. But since you make such a fuss I will tell her of it as a *fait accompli*, though it's all rubbish. Nothing she could say would make me give it up, so what's the good!"

"Then you don't mind if she is angry?" she asked.

"Oh, more or less, what does it matter!" he replied. "She's done the worst she can already. She turned me out of the house when I left Constantinople, and has never given me a piastre since. What more can she do! Luckily she can't disinherit me."

It was the first time he had alluded to his finances, and apparently the words had slipped out unawares, for he flushed slightly and changed the conversation. Clare had sometimes wondered, knowing that he received nothing from his mother, how he was able to live as he did, with his pockets always full of money, denying himself nothing, and trying to force costly jewels



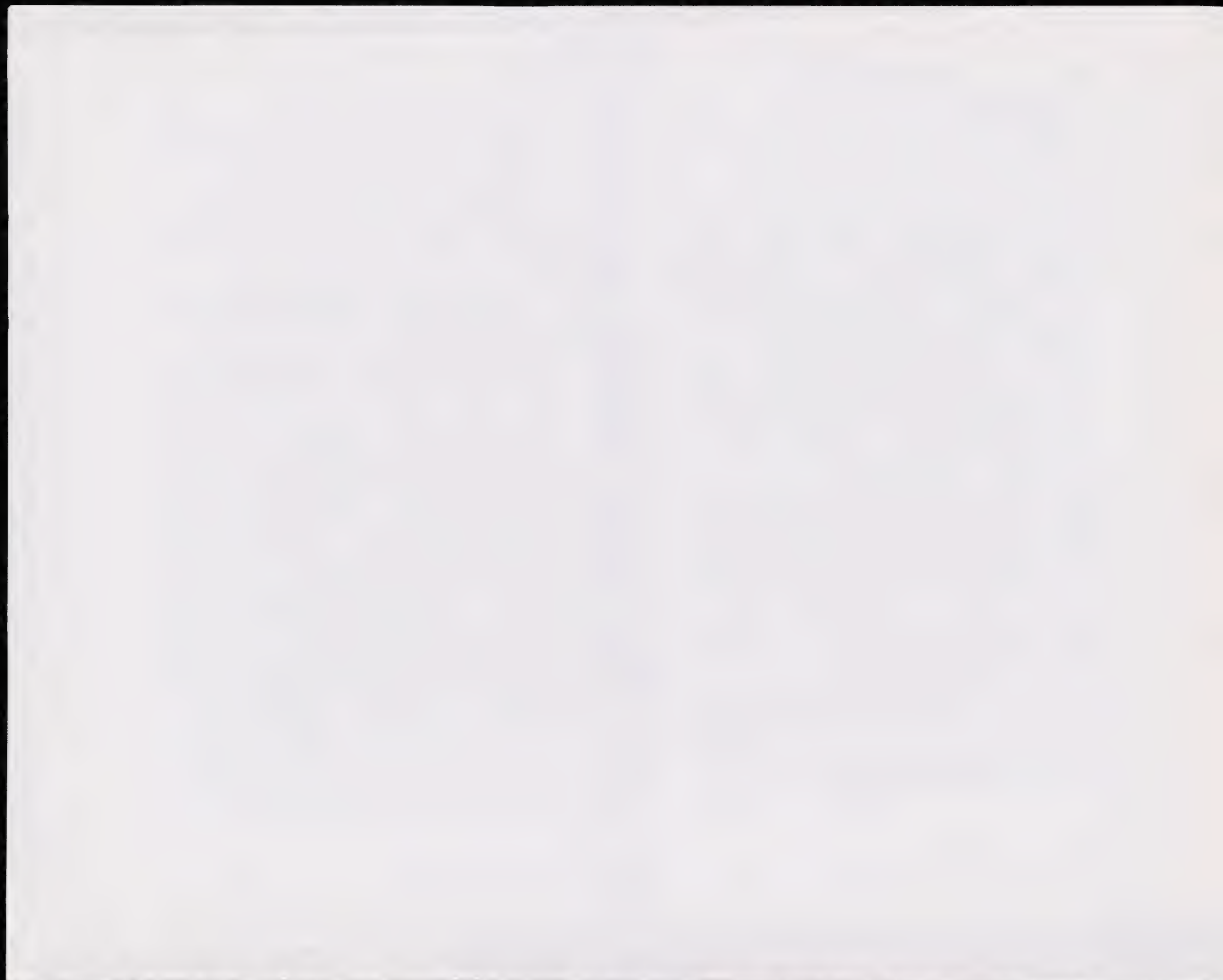
and other gifts upon her. These she had steadily refused from the first, and with so much decision that he had had to give in, but he managed nevertheless to spend a good deal on orchids, tea-roses, and other expensive flowers, which he sent to her room when she was out. The fact was that Mrs. Potter, with a heart overflowing—with love, and money-bags overflowing with dollars, had forced him to accept a handsome allowance (under the guise of a loan to save his pride), and this Clare suspected, though she put the disagreeable thought from her. She had the greatest horror of people taking money from those to whom they are not bound by the ties of blood, and would infinitely have preferred that her husband should accept it from herself. But since both Loutfi and Mrs. Potter kept a discreet silence on the matter she had no excuse for interfering.

As Loutfi had foreseen, the Princess Melek was mad with rage when she received in her Cairo home the letter announcing his engagement. So furious was she indeed, that she had a narrow shave of being carried off then and there by a stroke of apoplexy. She screamed and fought, tore at her gold hair, and finally, fat as she was, rolled herself on the ground and bit the fringe of

the carpet in her paroxysm of fury. The old eunuch Abdul, who had looked after Loutfi as a child and adored him, came to the rescue, and grasped her in his bony arms, or who knows to what lengths her rage might have driven her. He had a logical mind, this Soudanese giant, and though his Islamic soul was aghast at his boy marrying a Ghiour, yet he felt that it was the inevitable consequence of bringing him up à la Franca. He was the only person in the household who had the least influence with the Princess, but in a crisis like the present his remonstrances recoiled on his own head.

"You are all against me—a nest of vipers!" she shrieked, when he had interceded for her son. "He has found means to bribe you! May Allah forsake and punish you! I will never forgive him—never! Marry a Ghiour—an infidel daughter of dogs! Aman! May the curse of Allah light upon you all!"

So after a fortnight's ominous silence, which it must be owned did not at all disturb his peace of mind, her son received the answer to his faire-part. Its outward form was suave, for it was in the elegant lettering of her Arab secretary, and enclosed in a pink perfumed envelope heavily emblazoned with the Khedivial crown.



"Cruel and unnatural boy!" (it ran.)
 "If you persist in marrying a Ghiour—(may the curse of Allah be upon her!)—you will see me no more nor receive from me another piastre! I will take no infidel into my house nor permit her to bear your father's name! You act as the enemy of Islam and of your mother who gave you birth! But if you persist in this great crime, I am no longer your mother! Take warning! Allah will punish and forsake you in a future world!"

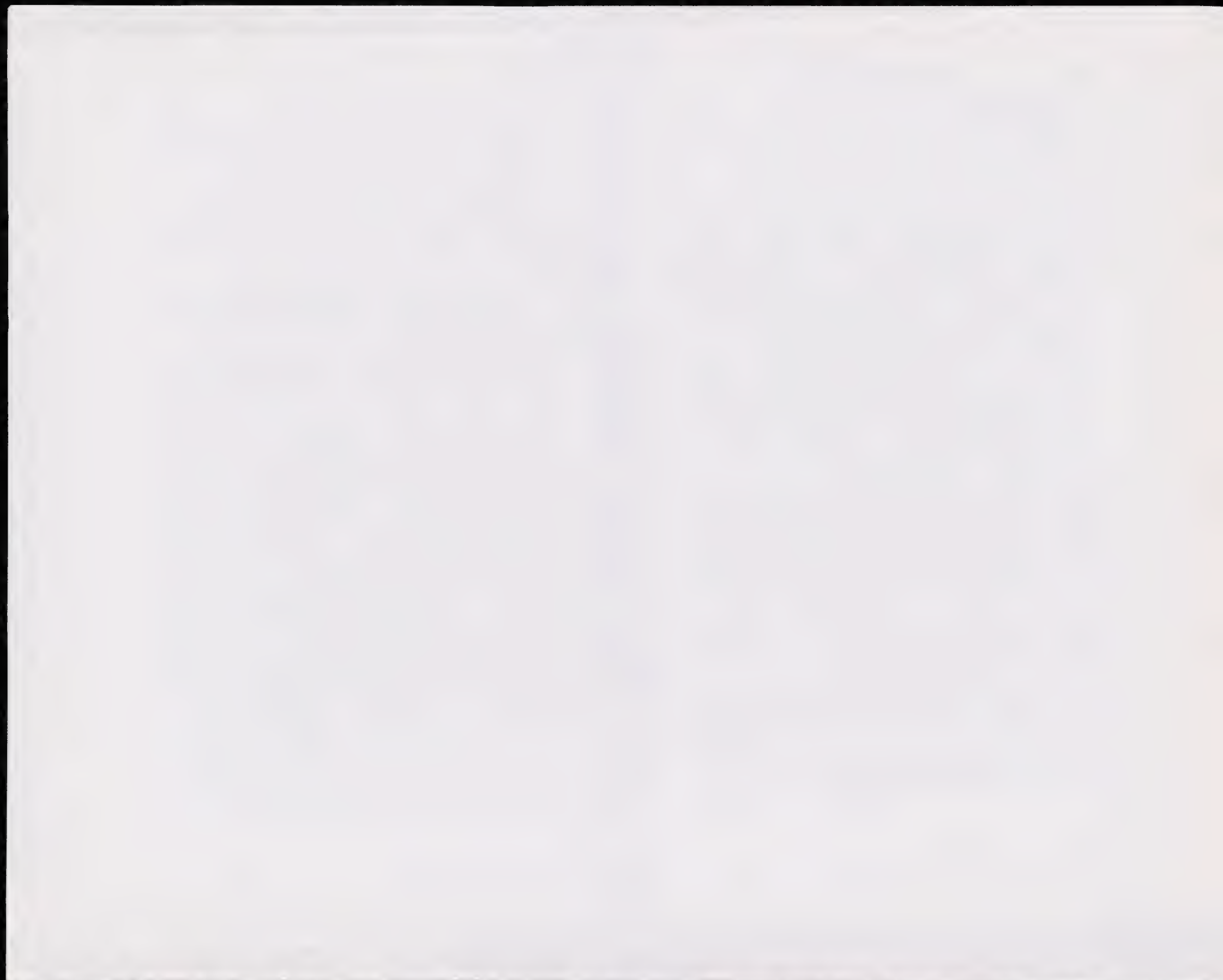
She had dictated a much more explosive effusion, but by dint of coaxing, Abdul had succeeded in modifying its violence, and the secretary had omitted a few of the worst imprecations.

Loutfi received the formidable document when they were smoking their after-dinner cigarettes, and he tore it open with a muttered oath. When he had read it he crushed it in his hand, set fire to it and watched it curl up and fall, a heap of blackened ashes, into the silver tray. Clare looked on but did not question him for she disliked to hear him abuse his mother, and after all her anger was of no importance to her. She would, indeed, have welcomed any exercise of authority which might

have put a stop to the marriage; but she guessed rightly that as long as Mrs. Potter and her subsidies were there, his mother had no sort of hold over him.

Mrs. Potter, unconscious Lachesis, without whose weaving the ill-assorted union would never have taken place, was in raptures over what *she* called "the happy affair." She was fond of Clare and she adored Loutfi, and what is more satisfactory than to link together in eternal bonds two beings that one loves? Mrs. Potter, then, stood beaming over the completion of her work, feeling, so miraculously had circumstances aided her, that the Heavens themselves smiled upon the match. She blessed even Loutfi's illness (now that it was happily over), since without that, she guessed rightly, it would never have taken place. She had insisted on their spending their honeymoon at her yali, and as Clare had always longed to stay on the Bosphorus, she was glad enough to gather such crumbs of comfort out of the affair as she could. Princess Melek always spent the autumn and winter in Cairo, so there was nothing to be said against the plan.

Mrs. Potter's yali stood between Bebek and Arnautkeuy. It looked straight across to the ruins of Anatoli Hissar, where the Sweet Waters



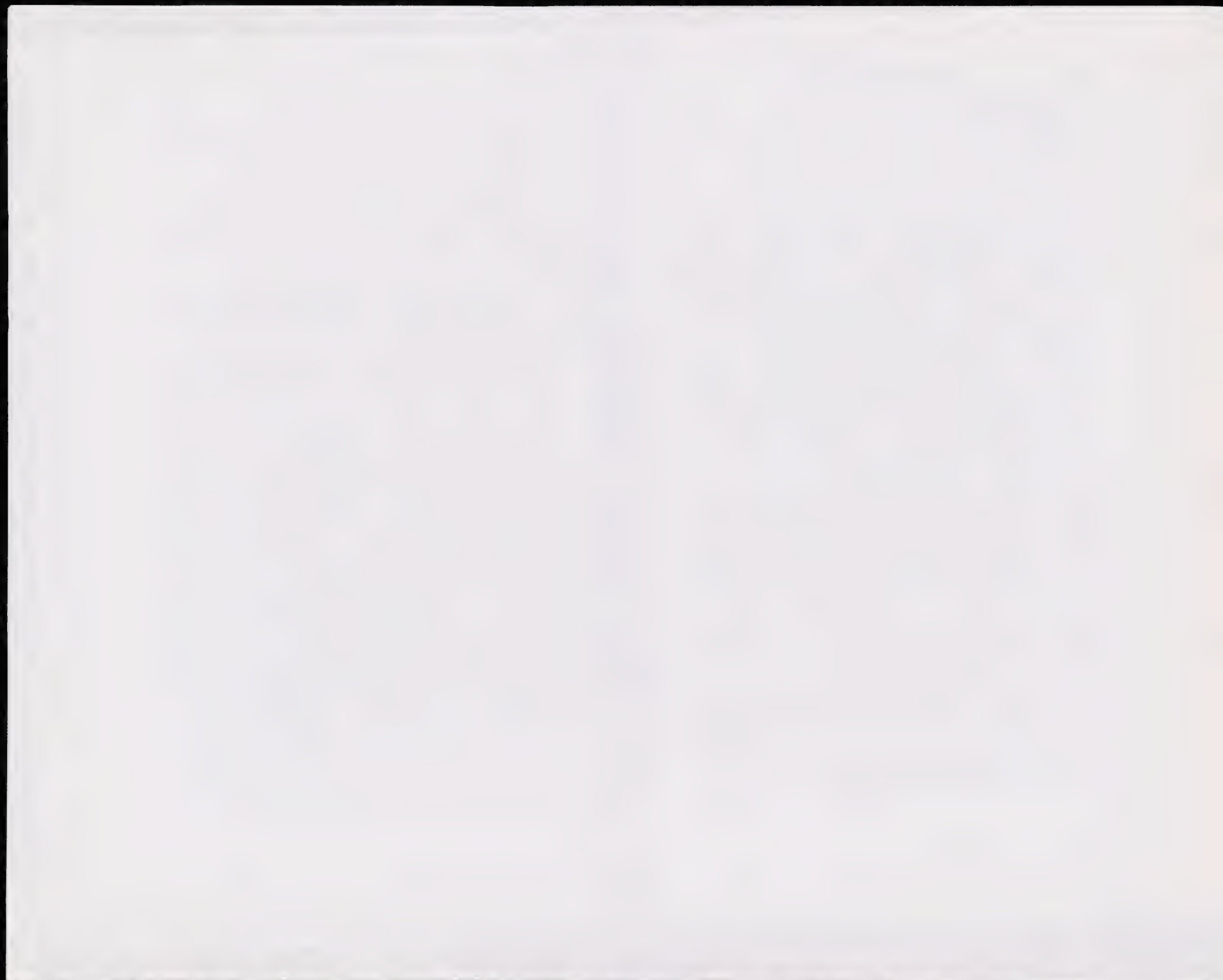
of Asia flow gently into the sea, and it was Clare's chief delight to row herself up the little stream, winding among its tangle of fig and elder, shadowed by the cypresses of the old cemetery which straggles along its banks.

As soon as the sun was up and while Loutfi (who detested early rising) was still in bed, she would call Claudine, and the two would embark in a light skiff, row across the Bosphorus and up the river, where they would remain till midday. Sometimes she would take sandwiches and a flask of Greek wine and eat her lunch among the mouldering tombs, watching the goats nibbling the long grasses or picking their way daintily between the moss-grown slabs, with the sun shining down between the cypresses, which stood out black against the vivid green of the grass and the vivid blue of the sky. The autumn was unusually mild and the sun at midday had lost but little of its summer heat, and she would sit for hours wrapt in poetic day-dreams, till Loutfi, impatient at her absence, would come and disperse them, forcing her to go back to receive some guest or to spend the afternoon at Pera. The Eaux Douces bored Loutfi to extinction and he hated the vicinity of the dead.

The yali hung sheer over the water like a

Venice palace, and Clare was never tired of watching the everchanging life and movement on the marvellous waterway. Never was any highroad so alive with traffic, nor any sea so full of fish, nor any sky so thick with birds! Her bedroom and salon both gave on the Bosphorus, and she would sit for hours in her chaise-longue watching the animated scene. Now it was a shoal of dolphins playing just below, rolling over and over like water-wheels, the spray splashing in rainbow hues from their sleek bodies. Now it was a bronze-limbed fisherman in sky-blue or daffodil tunic, taking up his pots full of crawfish as large as young lobsters. Sometimes would pass a Greek frigate with high prow gaily painted and gilded, so strange of shape that it seemed the very same which might have landed Menelaus and the Island Princes on the Plains of Troy. Once on a Friday afternoon a long white boat flashed up the stream, rowed by fourteen oarsmen clad in white, with purple velvet jackets blazing with gold, and beneath the Imperial parasol which glowed in the sun like a huge purple rose, she recognized the good-natured pink face of Sultan Mehmet.

The water was alive with jelly-fish of all sizes, from an umbrella to a sixpence, and she would



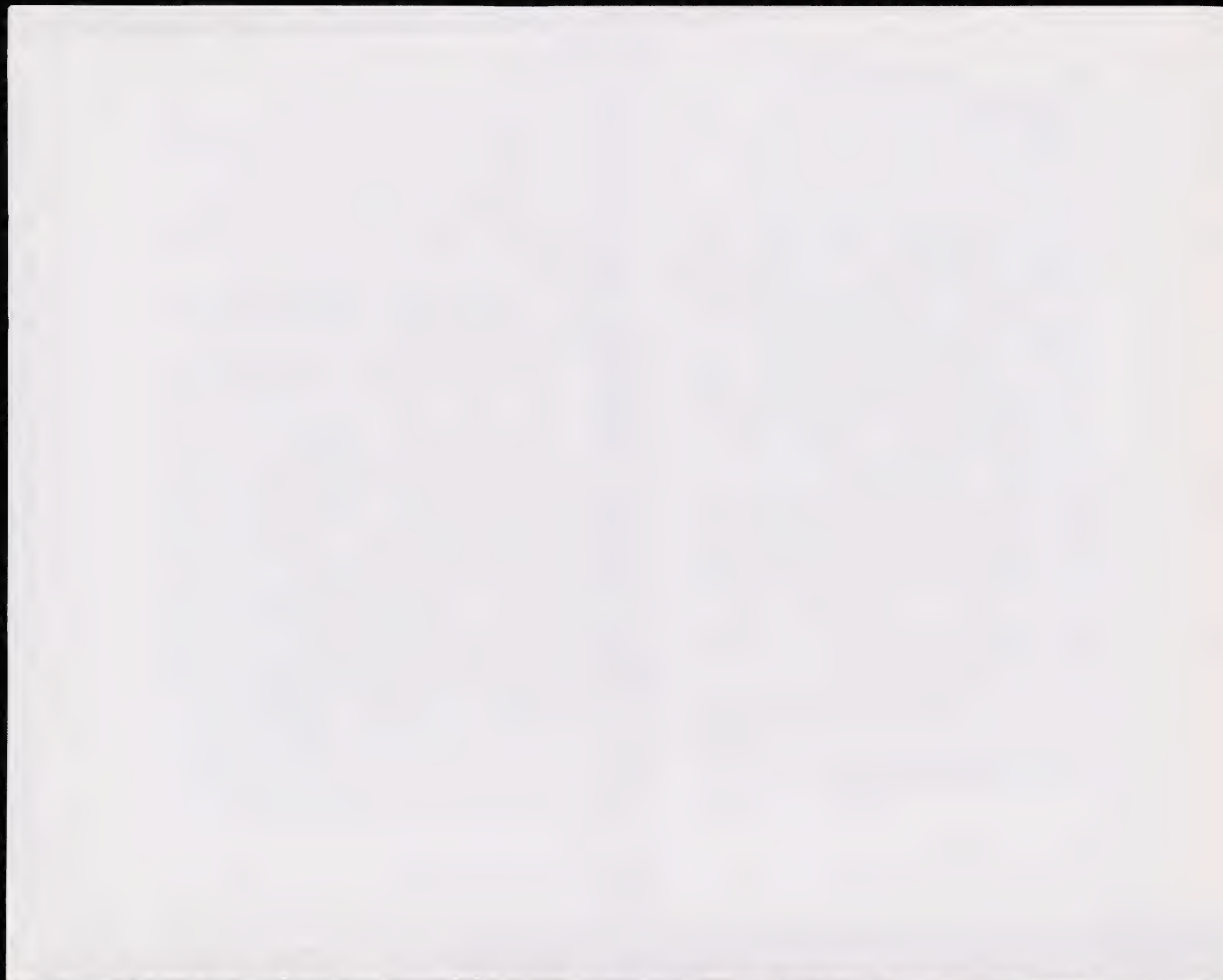
watch them expand great glutinous petals, clutch the tiny minnows and then contract and digest them in peace in their transparent stomachs. Above, the air was alive with the small black and white birds that skim for ever up and down in two separate flights, one coming, one going. The Turks call them *Lost Souls*, for they are never seen to alight either on sea or land, and to Clare they recalled Paolo and Francesca, blown hither and thither like dry leaves in an autumn storm.

Loutfi was still in the first joys of satisfied love and possession, and was never tired of asserting his ownership, more in the Oriental style than she cared for. It never seemed to enter his head that she might weary of his caresses, and she did her best to submit with a good grace. Once out of his bed he followed her about wherever she went and seemed never happy unless she was by his side. To her, needing much solitude, like all those whose mind is developed more than their senses, it was positive torture that she could never go out or remain alone in her room without being reproached. He loved her in his way, that was certain, but as a master loves a favourite slave, who belongs to him and is not supposed or permitted to have any life apart from his. Whatever he wanted must be done, when he wished and how he

wished, without a thought of her mood. If she refused or showed disinclination, he would insist, sometimes caressingly, sometimes angrily, according to his humour, but always with the persistence of a fly returning to the same spot as often as it is brushed away. He was like a child who thinks the world is made only for its pleasure, and could not understand, since he wanted to be with her why she should not want to be with him. And even had he understood it would have made no difference. His own desire was sufficient reason for her obedience.

He had been so spoiled during his convalescence by herself as well as Mrs. Potter (who always obeyed his whims), that when he got well, accustomed to her indulgence, he sulked like a child if he was thwarted, and accused her of ceasing to love him. She felt hopeless sometimes of ever putting things on a normal footing between them.

He was visibly irritated at her enthusiasm over the beauties of the Bosphorus. He had been used to it as long as he could remember, for his mother would always pass the summer months in her yali at Vanikeuy when the heat drove her from Cairo, and he had been so bored there that the very sight of it got on his nerves.



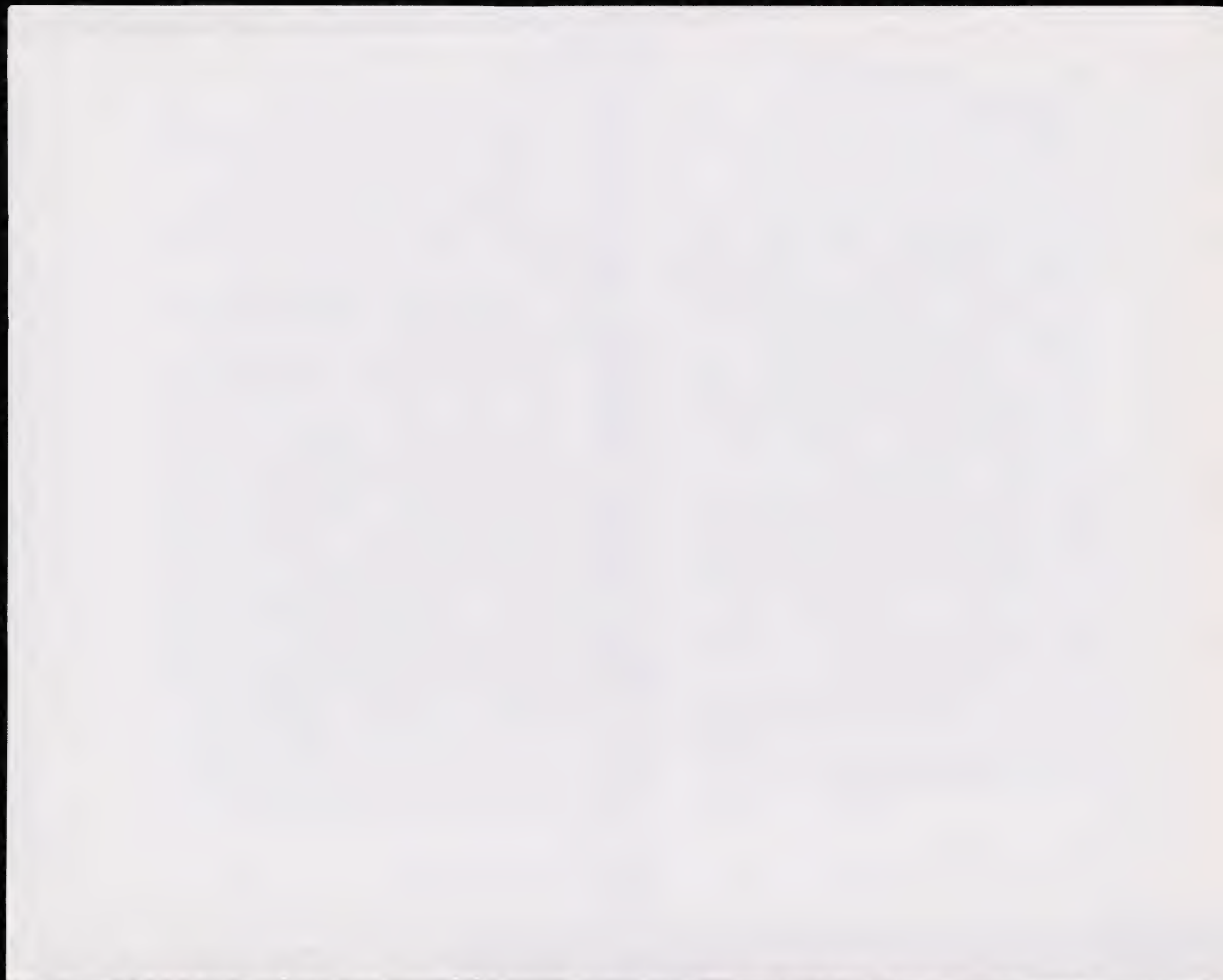
Now that she was his by all the laws of proprietorship and he no longer needed the intermediary of art, he did not attempt to hide his impatience. He had even given her to understand that he considered his outlook on life superior to hers, and despised her enthusiasm for nature, which he called sentimental rot! He would accuse her of inconsistency, telling her that she violated Nature's first law by her coldness, and asserting that the only valuable thing in life is love. (A lexicographer, Clare thought, would hardly have employed that word to describe his sentiments.)

Once, soon after his illness, when he was in a more serious mood than usual, she had been led by some poem she was reading to speak of her theory that by self-discipline and effort only do we develop the precious germ we feel to be immortal—the EGO which is our real self. And he had turned her into ridicule, laughing—"Ah, well! If your creed is only Egoism we ought to get on splendidly! I'm an Egoist too!" She perceived that they had not even a common language, and that by no simplification of terms could she make him grasp her meaning. So the remnants of hope she once had of developing his mind had gradually vanished, for his fortress

of ignorance, mockery, and contempt was impregnable.

It can be readily understood that she was not very happy to find her worst fears thus realized. The sole pleasure she had was in the beauty of the place and the exotic charm of the life around her. She was beginning to feel that she had only one hope left to save her from despair, and would vaguely look forward to the time when his passion for her would cool, and their lives would drop naturally apart, leaving her, relatively at least, free. It was a terrible thought for a bride of two weeks!

One morning she had wandered with Claudine up the cliff garden behind the house and out on the terrace of one of the ruined kiosks with which the place was filled. It was a favourite spot with her, for the view from this point was marvellous. The whole winding water-way from Kavak to Galata stretched at her feet, like a huge green serpent with glittering scales. Its head lay prone in the Black Sea and its tail curved to a point between Stamboul and Scutari. She forgot Loutfi, her marriage, her disappointments and even her very existence, her heart throbbing for the moment in unison with the great pulse of Nature. Such moments are of infinite value when earthly cares



weigh down the soul. How small and mean seem the petty worries of life and its equally petty sorrows!

She was recalled to both from her sublime musings by the voice of Loutfi shouting to her from below, and presently he appeared, looking very fresh and handsome as he climbed the steep path with the buoyant step of a young goat. From the top of his gold head to the tip of his well-shod feet he radiated health and daintiness. So might Paris have looked when he appeared to Ænone, "his sunny hair clustered about his temples like a god," and Clare could not help wishing, as she stood watching him, that his mind was as much in tune with the delicious place as his body.

"I say, Clare!" he said, when he had joined her on the terrace, "what are you doing in this tumble-down old place? I can't imagine why Mrs. Potter doesn't pull down these ugly ruins! She promised me she would."

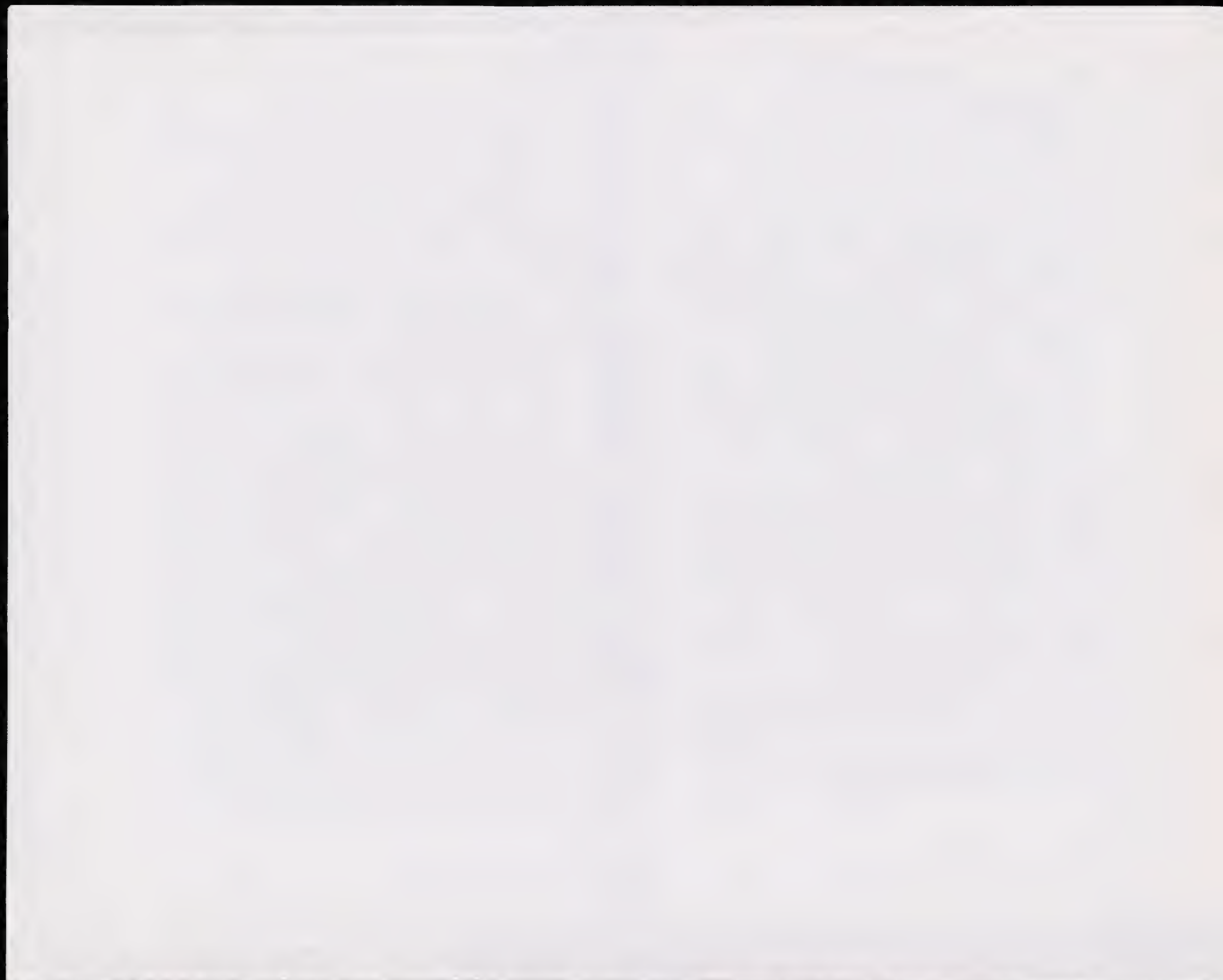
Two months ago she would have tried to explain to him the charm of the ruins, but he had lately shown so much impatience at what he called her "lectures" that she merely remarked—"It's called the Kiosk of the Nightingales, Husein tells me." (Husein was one of the gardeners.)

"Beastly birds!" he exclaimed brutally. "They kept me awake half the night! I must give orders to have them all shot!"

Clare had heard them too throbbing out their hearts as if they would burst, and those on the Asian shore answering from their groves. She felt a thrill of anger and disgust at his speech, but she said nothing, knowing that any rebuke would be received with a gibe. What had she in common with this thoughtless boy! She had more with the gardener Husein, who had just presented a rose to her with a grace and evident appreciation of its beauty worthy of a poet.

Loutfi had a little cane in his hand, and as he stood talking he kept whisking off the buds of the late roses, which had pushed through the trellis-work, till there was quite a little heap at his feet. Every slash of the stick, every bud that fell, was like a blow on her own body. She had observed this habit of his even in Florence, and had begged him to try and cure himself, but since his illness he had fallen back into his old ways, and now when she remonstrated he either took no notice or said "Zut!"

"Look here!" he went on, lighting a cigarette, "it's awfully dull in this beastly hole,



isn't it? Let's go and have lunch at the Pera Palace."

Now Clare loathed Pera. It was the only thing about Constantinople that she didn't like, the little modern town with its Palace Hotel, its Bon Marché and Funicular Railway, pretentious, and entirely lacking in local character. So she said—

"You go, dear boy, and let me stay here. It's so far to go and so dull when you get there."

"Not half so dull as Bebek!" he retorted. "We could find some people we know there and have some bridge at least."

Loutfi had several friends among the attachés of the Embassies, and the Turkish officers, who lunched habitually at the hotel, but in his despotic way he was too much in love at present to go anywhere without her. Moreover, he was proud of her and liked to show her off in public.

"Won't you come?" he urged with the persistence she had learnt to dread. "You are getting very selfish, Clare! You never do anything I ask you!"

"I detest tu quoques, but aren't you a little selfish too?" she returned, losing patience for the first time since their marriage. "I adore this

place, and you want to drag me to that horrid little Pera which you know I dislike."

"Well, I don't like Bebek, and yet I came to please you!" he replied magnanimously. "Do come, Clare! At least there's some life in Pera!"

"And what do you call this?" she exclaimed, with a sweeping gesture towards the Bosphorus.

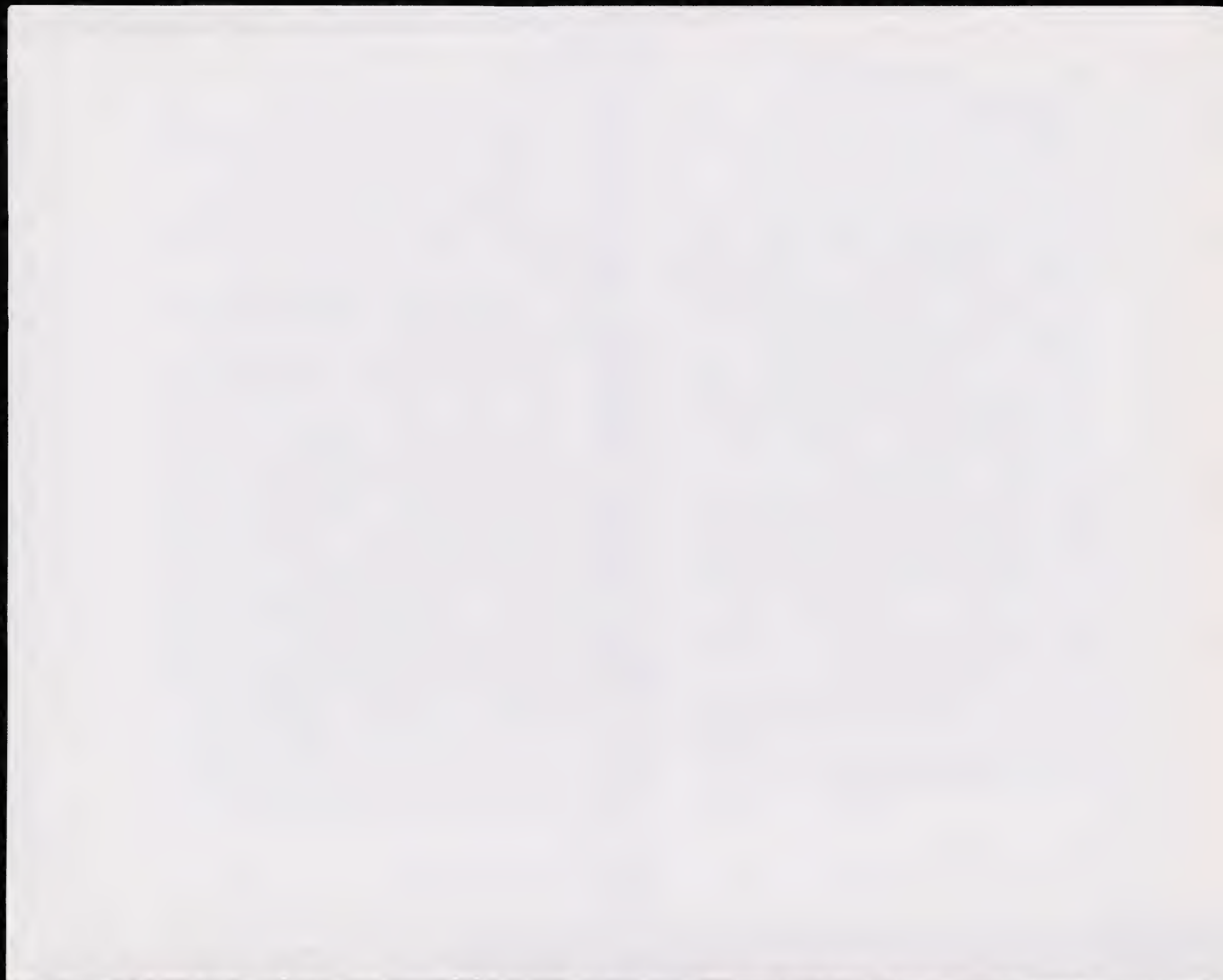
"Aman! Now you're off!" he said angrily, with a vicious cut at the roses. "Damn Nature! I'm sick of the very name!"

It was the first time he had ever so brutally expressed himself, and she had another thrill of disgust. But she said nothing, knowing the futility of speech.

"Now you've turned sulky again!" he went on, looking at her defiantly. "I can't help it! I've tried to bear it as well as I could! But I'm so heartily sick of this place! How long do you mean to stay here?"

"I don't want to leave just yet," she replied, looking with regret at the water sparkling at her feet.

"Zut!" he retorted. "I hoped you'd have got sick of cemeteries before this! I mean to go to Monte Carlo and play a bit to take out the taste! Let's go the day after to-morrow!"



"Oh, Loutfi! not so soon as that!" she said. "And as for Monte Carlo, dear boy, I'm afraid you will have to go by yourself! When I leave here I shall have to go back to Florence to see after my affairs. I told you that the monks of San Domenico were making a lawsuit about regaining possession of the villa."

"So much the better!" he said. "It's a good opportunity for getting rid of it!"

"For getting rid of it!" she exclaimed, astonished.

"Yes!" he replied defiantly. "I suppose you don't expect me to live in that dead-alive hole?"

She tried hard to be patient, but his tone was so aggressive that she felt it necessary to assert herself, so she replied coldly—

"I don't know what you mean to do, but I intend to live there myself."

"And then you say *I* am selfish!" he exclaimed angrily. "We've been married only two weeks and already you talk of leaving me! You won't do the smallest thing I ask you, and you expect me to go and bury myself in a hole without any one to speak to for the rest of my life!"

"But, Loutfi, I don't expect or even want

you to!" she replied wearily. "There's no reason because we are married that we should be always together. You can stay there as long as you can bear it, and I shall be a great deal in Paris. You know I promised you I would take an apartment there. But you can't expect me to give up my villa and change my tastes just to please you."

"But you are always wanting me to change mine! I don't see the difference. Give me any proof that my tastes are not as good as yours, or any just reason why you should convert me more than that I should convert you!"

What reason could she give that he would have understood? It would be like trying to explain why the perfume of a violet is preferable to the smell of garlic. So she remained silent.

"You see, you can't answer!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "It's only the point of view! My tastes are as good as yours—better even, because I'm in touch with life while you care only for the dead! I believe you like Constantinople only because it seethes with graves."

It was the old accusation—plausible too, given the point of view—that she was so weary of, Sibyl's reproach, that she lived in the Past



not in the Present. It was terrible to think that henceforth she would always have it ringing in her ears.

"Anyway, I've a right to my ideas as much as you to yours!" he went on, pursuing the advantage he thought he had gained.

"That is true!" she said sadly. "And the only wrong either of us did was when we married each other, considering how different our ideas are."

It was the first time she had ever given expression to the thought which was constantly in her mind, and the words escaped almost in spite of herself. She was sorry directly she had spoken, for her husband flushed darkly.

"Parbleu! I've been expecting that!" he exclaimed; "I knew you were getting sick of me! It's been easy to see that for several days! You spend half your time away from me and turn aside when I touch you! You never kiss me of your own accord, and when I kiss you you look disgusted! Nothing will animate you! I might just as well have married a stone!"

She sighed wearily. It was true. She felt positively icy when he caressed her and it was useless to deny it. Perhaps it would have been

different if his caresses did not always savour so strongly of ownership.

Her silence and the sigh irritated him more and more.

"Ah, you think yourself a martyr because you accepted me when I was ill—out of pity, I suppose you would say! I believe the only man you care for is that effeminate fool Maryx, and you want to go back to Florence because of him!"

She made a little gesture of disgust but remained silent. To defend herself from such a charge would have been a useless humiliation.

"Why don't you answer?" he asked, looking at her suspiciously. "I suppose because you don't want to lie! By God——" He slashed off a shower of roses at her feet. "By God—if I thought it were true—I'd kill you as you stand there—you first, and that damned little scorpion after!"

She glanced at him disdainfully but remained silent, too disgusted to reply.

Her attitude exasperated him more and more.

"Is it true?" he said savagely, coming nearer menacingly.

"Is what true?"



"That that infernal fellow Maryx is your lover?"

She looked him in the eyes with cold disdain. "Maryx is my friend, not my lover," she said quietly. "If you can understand such a thing."

"Thank God I can't!" he replied brutally. "Thank God I've got blood in my veins, not water?"

"After all, you're my wife!" he went on, with the flush in his cheeks and the flame in his eyes which she had learnt to dread. "However I got you I don't mean to give you up—to Maryx or any one else! You are mine by all the laws of God and man—that's certain——"

And he seized her in his arms suddenly and kissed her on the mouth, as a master kisses his slave or the lover of a night his courtesan.

She shook herself free, wrenching herself from his embrace. Her eyes blazed as they had blazed the morning after the Abbaye supper.

"Don't touch me like that!" she exclaimed furiously, her face as flushed as his own; "I am your wife, not your mistress, nor your slave! You have no right over me unless I choose——"

She looked superb in her fury, and again the same admiration was stirred in his heart. "By George! You're magnificent when you are

roused!" he exclaimed half mockingly. "Why the devil do you only get animated when you are angry! Other women get like that for love—you must have a very bad character, Clare!"

His stare and the mocking words lashed her blood to boiling point. She could have struck him in the face as he stood there enjoying the result of his insults. But she controlled herself by a supreme effort, turned from him with disdain and, sweeping past him as though he did not exist, went quietly down the path towards the house.

"Damn your cold northern blood!" he muttered, switching off another shower of roses. But he did not attempt to follow her, for though he liked to rouse her anger, he felt like a whipped schoolboy under the lash of her contempt.

"God help us both!" Clare murmured to herself as she went to her own room and leant out of the great window which gave on the Bosphorus, "God help us! If it is as bad as this two weeks after marriage, what will it be after a year!"



CHAPTER II

YES! They've come back! I saw them in the Tornabuoni yesterday. She looked more arrogant than ever, and he seemed thoroughly bored, poor fellow! They weren't speaking a word, and he was yawning as though he would split his mouth. I'm not surprised. It's what I prophesied the moment I heard of the marriage!"

So spoke Elena Davanti, receiving a dozen of her most intimate friends to tea in the huge shabby salon overlooking the Arno, through the windows of which the sun was shining, still hot although it was the middle of November.

"Ah, ma chère! I was never so astonished in my life as when I heard of the marriage!" exclaimed her friend, Bice Vanucci, an anæmic blonde, who had been in love with Carlo for years and detested Clare as a rival. "It was no less than kidnapping to force a gosse like that to marry her!"

"Yes!" echoed Laura Careno, wife of the

banker at whose bank Clare had no account. "I wonder how she managed it? A Prince too and enormously wealthy, they say!"

"Who says?" exclaimed Elena. "He's not got a penny till his mother dies, and she's almost as young as his wife! At present it's Clare who has to keep him!"

"They say in Paris that she got hold of him when he was ill—weak from loss of blood after an auto accident," continued Donna Bice. "It seems she forced herself into his room when he was half delirious, and wouldn't leave it till he had signed an agreement to marry her!"

"Ah!" said Colonel Bayly, a retired British officer, whose love of gossip and scandal had procured him several snubs at the Schifanoia. "I always thought it fishy that she never married like her sisters, considering that she has money. One guessed she had some good reason for leaving England suddenly as she did."

"Oh, that's easily explained," said Donna Elena. "She came to Italy to get an Italian Prince, and failing that she's hooked an Egyptian one."

"With who knows how many wives!" ejaculated the Colonel. "I don't think her tenure of the title is very strong."



"She'll be more conceited than ever now!" snapped Miss Schmidt, a journalist of Jewish extraction, who had never forgiven Clare for having sent cards by her footman instead of personally returning her call. "I suppose now she's a Princess she won't deign to notice our existence!" (Clare never had noticed Miss Schmidt's.)

"Poor Sabaheddine!" said Elena, pouring herself out a glass of marsala. "Such a nice boy he was! It's really a sin to have forced him to marry that iceberg!"

"Well, you know," said Porphirio Gomez, a would-be imitator of Zuloaga, who had an atelier in Paris and had pestered Clare in vain to be allowed to paint her portrait, "these marriages don't count for much anyway. He probably has several wives already, as the Colonel says, and if he wants to get rid of her he has only to say—'I divorce thee' and it's a fait accompli." Gomez was an authority on the subject, for he had spent a whole winter in Cairo painting the portraits of half a dozen of the Khedival family.

Elena pricked up her ears.

"Is that true?" she asked eagerly.

"Certainly it's true!" affirmed Colonel Bayly.

"I knew something about these Mussulmans when

I was in India. A marriage ceremony between them and a Christian is a mere farce—just a sop to respectability."

"Oh well! he won't want to get rid of her, I suppose," said Elena, sharply, "for he's not got a penny of his own!"

"Not got a penny!" echoed Gomez. "What are you saying, Donna Elena? Why, his mother is one of the richest of all the Khedival Princesses!"

"I think you are mistaken," she replied. "Princess Antonini, whose mother is running the boy, told me herself that he had no expectations whatever!"

"Princess Sibyl must have had some reason of her own for lying," he returned dryly. "She's enormously rich. She owns half the cotton-fields in the Fayoum."

"Well, in any case, she's quarrelled with him and won't give him a penny, so it comes to the same thing!"

"Not at all!" said Gomez. "Princess Melek won't last long, and she can't disinherit him. Madame Clare knew what she was about when she forced him to marry her!"

"Not last long?" exclaimed Elena. "But she's quite young still—almost as young as his wife."



"Possibly," he returned. "But she's had two strokes of apoplexy already and the least thing might carry her off. I heard all about her when I was painting the portrait of her nephew, Prince Saïd Sabaheddine. He called her 'Tante Boule-de-Suif.' It seems she eats and drinks till she pants, and nearly dies of congestion after each meal. *He* didn't give her six months."

Elena looked serious. She began to suspect that Sibyl had purposely misled her, fearing a rival for Clare.

"Saïd knew what he was talking about!" Gomez went on, lighting a cigarette. "Her son inherits her fortune, but she doesn't spend a quarter of her income and he counts on getting a round sum at her death. Princess Melek is worth something like eighty thousand a year."

"Eighty thousand what—lire? Why it's nothing!" said Elena, with a little moue of disdain.

"Eighty thousand *pounds*!—And Egyptian pounds too, which are worth more than English ones!"

"Eighty thousand pounds! Dio mio! That makes two million francs! Why, it's enormous—colossal!"

She was dazzled at the amount. It was beyond her wildest dreams. And a mother not expected to live six months! And all that Clare had managed to get—Clare the iceberg—Clare who was already rich! And all that she might have had herself if only she had played her cards better and not been such a fool as to believe Sibyl Antonini!

When she had heard that he had no expectations and was living on Mrs. Potter's charity, she had slackened her efforts, idiot that she was! She ought to have guessed it was a trick to put her off because she had made a good impression and they wanted him for Clare! He was so inflammable that any one could have got him, and he had been so attracted by her! Now, thanks to her imbecility, it was Clare, not she who had won the prize—Clare, who had no need of money and would only spend it in old pictures and rubbish! It was maddening!

She let the conversation drift into other channels and lay back in her chair lost in thought. After a moment or two she struck a match and lighted a cigarette with the air of one whose mind is made up. To her energetic nature to think was equivalent to decision. After all, was the upshot of her musing, if it be really true that the



marriage of a Mussulman with a Christian counts for nothing—that he can have as many wives as he likes and divorce without any formality—what was to prevent her from getting him still—one way or another!

She rose and went over to the window which looked across to the Church of San Miniato.

"Gomez!" she called out in her high voice, "we have one of the most beautiful views in Florence from this window. Come and see it! You might like to paint it while you are here."

He left the rest of the party and joined her.

"Ah, Donna Elena," he said a little contemptuously, "I can't afford to waste my time on landscapes. I'm a portrait painter, you know!"

Elena was not at all interested in his affairs. She had called him in order to pursue her investigations more privately than was possible at the tea-table, so she abandoned the beauty of the view and asked, "Were you joking just now when you said that a Mussulman could divorce his wife without any formality?"

"Certainly not! It's a fact. He has only to say in the presence of one witness, 'By three times I divorce thee!' and she is bound to leave his house and go back to her own people."

"But he can't divorce her without reason, I suppose?"

"Absolutely! It's sufficient reason that he's tired of her."

"What a horribly unjust law!" she exclaimed, revolted in spite of herself. "It sounds incredible!"

He shrugged his shoulders. Himself he thought the law very wise and benignant, and had often wished he had been born in a faith so indulgent to masculine caprice.

"But I suppose they never *do* it nowadays?" she pursued.

"The Turks do constantly, but the Egyptians are more Europeanized. However, it's not uncommon among them, all the same. And at least it serves as a threat to keep their wives in order."

"And the poor wives—do they ever make use of that permission?"

"That's more rare. It's considered a bit vieux jeu now, but it has been done. I knew one Egyptian Pasha who had two wives, and he was a young man and spent most of his time in Paris. But they've mostly adopted the European custom of having one wife and many concubines—except that they generally omit the former!"



But why are you so interested in the subject, Donna Elena? You don't intend to imitate Princess Clare and marry a Mussulman, do you?"

"Chi lo sa!" she laughed, as she left the window and rejoined the group at the tea-table. "If I came across one as rich as her's I certainly would!"

* * * * *

That night when she and Carlo were smoking on the loggia after dinner, she said gaily, "Congratulate me, Carlo mio! I'm going to marry a Prince with eighty thousand pounds a year!"

Carlo, who had not been present at her tea-party, was astonished, as well he might be.

"A Prince with eighty thousand pounds a year!" he echoed. "Why, there's not one in Italy as rich as that!"

"It's not an Italian, it's an Egyptian!"

"Another Egyptian! Where the devil did you unearth him? What's his name?"

"His name is Loutfi Sabaheddine."

He stared at her in amazement, thinking she had lost her senses, for she was not wont to joke over the serious question of marriage. She jumped up and stood before him, her hands on her hips, her feet firmly planted, in an attitude

suggestive of the swashbuckler. "Listen to me!" she exclaimed, emphasizing each word. "If I am not the wife of Loutfi Sabaheddine before the end of twelve months, I'll forfeit my share of our despicable income! Mark my words! Before the end of 1911 I shall be a Princess and owner of eighty thousand pounds a year! What do you think of that?"

"I think you are mad!" he rejoined. "He's not been married three months and he adores his wife—if it's a divorce you are counting on."

"There's no absolute need for a divorce. And he doesn't adore her! People who adore their wives don't yawn and look the other way when they are with them."

And she recounted to her astonished brother the information she had collected that afternoon and the use she intended to make of it. He was sceptical as to her success, but admired her pluck and energy.

"Well, cara," he said when she had finished, "you're audacious enough, but it's a mad scheme, and if you fail we shall have all Florence about our ears."

"But I'm not going to fail! And I don't care a hang about Florence. I want a wider field—Paris! And when I'm married to Loutfi we'll



all live there together, and I'll find you a rich Jewess with bulging eyes, a high colour, and a chin flowing into her chest ! ”

She seemed so absolutely sure of herself that he felt more comforted than he had been for many a long day. For his debts were many and his creditors were pressing, and there was urgent need of the Jewess with bulging eyes and money-bags.

“But you must help me ! ” his sister went on. “You must forget your snub and make friends with Clare. It's essential to my plan that we should be on good terms with her. I'll go and call to-morrow and say you want her to forget your folly, and then you must go yourself and be very respectful and whine a bit. And above all, you must make great friends with her husband—mind that ! Take him about and amuse him and bring him here as often as you can. We must make it as gay as possible to contrast with her austerity and the conventual life she leads up there, and we must invest all our ready money in cakes and champagne. The introductory part of the programme rests with you. Play your rôle well, and I'll look after the rest ! ”

CHAPTER III

CLARE was only too pleased to accept the olive branch extended by the Davanti. She was delighted at the idea of Loutfi making friends with Carlo, and had she been privy to and approved of Elena's scheme, she could not have played more directly into her hands. She was as keen for her husband to find amusement as they were to offer it.

During the month they had passed in Constantinople she had gradually grown accustomed to the burden she had taken on her shoulders. After their first quarrel in the Kiosk of the Nightingales, Loutfi had sulked for the rest of that day and the next, had gone to Pera by himself, and never come near her at his return, but at the end of that time he had gone to her of his own accord and with an explosion of pent-up passion had begged her to forgive him. She had been touched at his self-humiliation, had reproached herself for her severity, and had tried



to see things from his point of view with such success that she almost lost sight of her own. He was so impulsive and irresponsible, she told herself, that she had no more right to blame him for his egotism than she had to beat Claudine for hers. She always gave in to her Pekingese when she bit and scratched to get her own way, and why should she be less indulgent to her husband? She was growing to accept that he was not a reasonable being with moral qualities capable of development, but a creature to be humoured as one humours a kitten or a puppy.

So she tried hard to be unselfish, gave up talking of art and serious things, and was careful not to be too enthusiastic over the beauties of nature. She tried hard to be gay and to throw herself into his amusements, leaving her beloved Bosphorus and going with him to Pera when he wished, and making her excursions on the water only during the hours when he lay in bed smoking or was lingering over his toilet. She hoped thus to temporize, and instead of expecting him to change all at once, to win him little by little. It would be easier, she hoped, when they went back to Florence where she had duties which even he must recognize. Meanwhile she would try by gentleness and tact to regain some of her

old influence over him—re-establish between them the Electra and Orestes attitude.

It was a good programme, but like all programmes its success depended on perseverance in the carrying out, and this was more difficult than she had bargained for. She was accustomed to discipline herself but was totally without experience in disciplining others, and she caught herself so often obeying her own moods in her indulgence or resistance of his desires, that she began to think she was almost as capricious as he.

At the end of a month Loutfi had grown so thoroughly and so clamorously bored that for the sake of peace she had been obliged to give in and leave Bebek, and for the same reason she agreed to spend a week with him at Monte Carlo on the way back. She hoped he might find friends there with whom he could remain while she went on to Florence, for her affairs were urgent, and her lawyer had insisted on her presence if she wished to retain possession of her villa. Loutfi would not hear of her going without him, much as he dreaded what he called the dead-alive hole, for his jealousy of Maryx was growing an obsession since her contemptuous treatment in Constantinople, and he turned



savage and made her violent scenes every time she suggested it.

He was delighted to leave Bebek and resume the only life he cared for—the life of play, of late hours, and joyous companions, male and female. Once in Monte Carlo he threw off his lethargy and ill-humour, regaining his old buoyancy, and became again the charming boy who had first won her sympathies. She was delighted at the change, and as he had found several people he knew and was constantly at the tables, she enjoyed more liberty than she had had since her marriage, for once in the Casino he was too absorbed to think of her or anything but his play.

One afternoon she was returning from Cap D'Ail, whither she had gone with Claudine for a picnic on the cliffs, and was climbing the steep gardens leading from the station, when she saw him strolling towards the Casino with a lady whose dress and bearing betrayed the world to which she belonged. He was bending over her and gazing amorously into her eyes, and Clare was astonished to feel a sharp stab of anger.

"I'm getting as capricious as he," she thought, trying vainly to crush out the feeling, "I've been longing for his passion to cool, and now that I

see him with another woman I'm angry! How unreasonable!"

When he returned from the tables that night, without comment on what she had seen, she attacked the subject of her return to Florence, thinking that now he was so well amused he would let her go without fuss. She told him that her presence was an absolute necessity and could be delayed no longer, and that she intended to start the following day, leaving him to follow when he choose.

He swore a good deal and tried hard to dissuade her, accusing her as usual of selfishness and indifference, but he absolutely refused to let her go alone, and after a stormy scene it was settled that they should both leave in a couple of days.

She was surprised to find herself less disappointed than she expected. On the contrary, she had a distinct sensation of pleasure that the attractions of Monte Carlo were less strong than her own. With her usual habits of self-analysis she tried to explain this seeming inconsistency, and being as truthful towards herself as she was towards others, had to acknowledge that her sentiment when she had seen him with the demi-mondaine had been nothing else but jealousy—



the ignoble emotion of jealousy! She could hardly believe it and tried hard to give it a more honourable name—disgust, disapproval, the wife's legitimate anger; but she was too honest to accept them. Was it possible, after all, that she was growing to care for her husband—not with Electra-like tenderness—but with love—with passion—as he cared for her! She had no experience of such love and could not be sure of the symptoms, but the mere suspicion of it alarmed her.

A couple of days later they were back at the Schifanoia, and she had been too monopolized by her business to give any more thought to it. The affair was of great moment to her, for the monks of the Dominican Convent, to which the villa had originally belonged, were trying to regain possession on the strength of some old parchments recently found among their archives, and she had to fight for her rights. For the first week after her return she had no time for anything but lawyers and documents.

Elena was right in deducing from Loutfi's yawns in the Tornabuoni that he was bored. The tranquillity of the villa was intolerable to him, and once or twice he decided that he must go to Paris or back to Monte Carlo. But he

hated the idea of leaving Clare in the neighbourhood of Ferdinand Maryx, for his causeless jealousy, increased with his vicinity to the hated rival, had become an *idée fixe*, and was gradually usurping the place of his waning passion. That his love for his wife was beginning to cool, especially of late since she had shown herself more pliable to his wishes, was certain; but the equally despotic passion of jealousy had taken its place, and he could not go away and leave Maryx master of the field.

So Elena and Carlo, with their gaiety and provision of amusement, fell just in the nick of time. The first thing in the morning when he was lying yawning in bed, wondering how he should get through the fifteen waking hours before him, Carlo would telephone to invite him to come to some afternoon dance or tennis or golf, and would afterwards propose his accompanying him and his sister to a dinner, theatre, or ball. He accepted gladly, preferring any sort of entertainment to yawning and drinking whisky and soda up at the villa, and Elena was so gay and animated and laid herself out to amuse him so successfully that if by chance he did not see her for the whole day he was dispirited and dull.



Clare was delighted that he had found something to occupy himself, and felt quite grateful to Carlo. She was unaware of Elena's attraction for him, for he would tell her on his return (often in the small hours of the morning) that he had been to a dance at some distant villa, or to a club dinner, or to the play, mentioning Carlo as his companion but never his sister. He would catechize her minutely as to how she had spent her day in his absence, making her account for every hour, but he never entered into any details concerning his own, and she had no reason for being suspicious, attributing the cooling of his passion, which she could not disguise from herself, to caprice. Elena came sometimes with her brother to the villa, but her manner to Loutfi was no more familiar than it had always been, and since she saw no one in Florence she did not learn what would certainly have been forced upon her ears in the scandal-loving little town—namely, that her husband's outrageous flirtation with Elena Davanti was the talk of the place.

She had been too occupied during the first two weeks after her return to think of her studies, but her business was now over. She had won her cause and secured her right to the

villa, Loutfi was apparently content to remain for the present, and she was at liberty to pick up the scattered threads of her old life. Oddly enough she did not feel any enthusiasm at the thought, and had to force herself to begin by sheer effort of will.

Her first free morning she congratulated herself that now she could go on with her book on Mantegna so long put by. But instead of setting about it she lingered in the garden smoking, took Claudine for a run in the bosco, and it was only with an effort that at last she sat down to her writing-table. Even then she was unable to concentrate her attention, kept looking at the clock and wondering what Loutfi was doing, and thinking how late the post was. She forced herself to go on, thinking her idleness was due to having lost the habits of work, but finally she gave it up in despair, threw down her pen and began to walk up and down the room fighting an irresistible desire to go and see Loutfi.

"How changed I am!" she said to herself. "I'm just as capricious as he! I was angry in Bebek when he wanted to be with me, and now I want him to want me! What has happened?"



At that moment the footman brought in her letters and she caught at the interruption gladly, relieved at any excuse not to work. She opened and read them slowly, glanced through the journals, and then once more forced herself conscientiously back to her writing-table.

It was useless. Her brain was like a clock that has run down. She sat pen in hand, but no ideas flowed from its point as they used. She looked at the photographs, but, like Peter Bell's primrose, they seemed merely photographs and nothing more. At last in despair she pushed them away, leant back in her chair and began to search her mind for the clue to such unwonted restlessness.

After a few minutes merciless probing she perceived that it was not her mind that was in fault, and was horrified to discover that it was due to an overwhelming desire to be with her husband. Ashamed of her weakness yet unable to conquer it, she decided that she would indulge herself for once.

"Dear boy!" she thought, as she went down the passage to his rooms, "it's the first morning visit I've paid him since we left Bebek. He'll be so pleased."

"Avanti!" called out Loutfi gaily in answer

to her knock; but when he saw who it was his voice changed, and he said with a very embarrassed air: "You, Clare! You are the last person I expected. Is anything the matter?"

He was lounging on the sofa by the window reading a letter. The table beside him was covered with illustrated papers, among which *Le Rire* and *La Vie Parisienne* were conspicuous. On a low inlaid coffee-table close by were bottles of Canadian Club whisky and soda-water, and by his side on the sofa a litter of letters and opened envelopes. Some of these the wind, which was gusty, had scattered on the floor, and as Clare entered he stooped hastily, gathered them together and laid them in a heap on the table.

She was disappointed to get no more cordial welcome, remembering with a pang how pleased he had been at Bebek on the rare occasions when she went to his room in the morning. She was silent for a minute, lighted a cigarette, and sat down in an armchair watching him as he arranged his papers, and thinking what a charming picture he made in his turquoise-blue silk, with his flushed face and gold hair against the pale yellow brocade of the sofa.

When he had finished he turned to her with



the same embarrassed air and asked her again if she wanted anything.

"No, dear boy," she replied, "I don't want anything, but as this is my first free morning I thought I would come and see how you were."

As she spoke a sudden gust of wind through the open window again scattered the little heap of papers he had put on the table and several of them fell at her feet. One—a sheet of rose-pink paper scrawled over in a large schoolboy hand—was blown directly on her knees as she sat. With a muttered oath Loutfi darted forward and seized it, but not before she had recognized the characteristic handwriting, and had, almost against her will, read the words at the bottom of the page. They were written in characters clear and legible as Roman lettering—

"A toi, cheri !

ELENA."

Her first impulse was to demand an explanation, but Loutfi's face was so scarlet, and he threw her a look so full of guilt and defiance, that no explanation was needed. The words died on her lips, and for the space of a whole minute they remained silent, their eyes riveted on each other like beasts at bay. Then without a word or a gesture she rose and left the room.



CHAPTER IV

WHAT were her feelings when she reached her study and threw herself half dazed into her chair ! For a long while she sat there doing nothing, saying nothing, her limbs rigid, her heart and brain alike paralysed. Then suddenly a passion of revolt and anger shook her and her muscles relaxed. What ! She had sacrificed herself, her liberty, her most precious ideals, to this capricious libertine, who was no better than an animal ! She had stooped to his level out of pity, outraged her own instincts and pride, and it was all thrown away ! He had preferred a woman like Elena Davanti, base and sensual like himself, and had deceived and turned her into ridicule ! His passion, which she had so foolishly believed sincere, had been a mere transient appetite lasting no longer than its satisfaction, not so long as a voluptuary's engouement for a courtesan ! And for this she had ruined her happy life, degraded her mind,



weakened her intelligence, so that she was no longer capable of work. It was monstrous—abominable—a crime worthy of death!

She clenched her hands in the violence of her wrath till the points of her nails entered the flesh. A drop of blood on the pale silk of her kimono recalled her to reason and self-control.

The tempest of her anger passed away, and she opened her hands and looked disdainfully at the small stigmata-like wounds in the palms. Was he worth even that drop of blood, she asked herself contemptuously. What a despicable creature after all! She had always known him to be capricious, egotistic, sensual—but a treacherous coward—no! She had credited him with the animal's virtues as well as the animal's vices!

From anger and contempt her mood passed to deep despondency and self-reproach. She was more guilty than he after all, for he knew no better, had obeyed his animal instincts unconsciously, while she had sacrificed all that was best in her wittingly, weakly, out of fear. She had shirked a responsibility which she should have accepted bravely. She had renounced all that was noble and pure in her life, with the result that instead of raising him to her level she had

lowered herself to his. What else did her incapability for study—her growing caprice—the loss of her grip on life mean, except that? What did this very anger and suffering mean, except that? Was it not the revolt of the flesh against the twin demons of desire and jealousy that possessed her? She was mistress of herself no longer. The irresponsible creature to whom she had linked her life out of compassion was henceforth her master! How wise and clear-sighted was Nietzsche when he bade us beware of pity!

And now what was to be done? Was it possible to go on living under the same roof with the man who had so outraged her—degraded her in the eyes of the world, turned her noblest instincts into ridicule—the man who had wrecked her life and half killed her soul? Instinctively she made a gesture of revolt and disgust. It was ignoble—ignominious—and yet—if she turned him out—what then!

The stab at her heart revealed the horrible truth. If she parted from him it was *she* who would suffer, not he! She, who had been so heart-free all her life—she, who had known love only on its nobler side as the emotion that inspires tenderness and sympathy—she, who had



been absolute mistress of her senses, she was forced now to own that she was held in their bondage, that she could not face life without him, that she *needed* his caresses and had no strength to drive him from her.

Then followed a terrible battle between her soul and her senses. The tussle was sharp but the victory was soon gained, and the weakened soul quailed before its truculent foe. The victors imp-like took the field, reasoning with the juggling sophistry of their kind.

"Forgive him!" they whispered, "that is the wisest—the noblest course. Pardon is God-like and the fault is yours, not his! He is an Oriental with hot blood, and you are cold as ice. How often have you refused his caresses and turned away from his pleading? Is he to blame if he seek satisfaction elsewhere?"

"And after all," they urged more boldly, gaining ground as the soul grew more feeble, "why should you be more angry now than when he made love to the demi-mondaine at Monte Carlo? Elena Davanti is of the same type and lures him with the same wiles. His passion for her will last no longer than that. The legitimate wife should not resent nor even deign to notice such ignoble commerce."

So the imps reasoned, and won her over to their side. Her anger subsided, her contempt was replaced by a sentimental pity, her despondence by a sensuous anticipation. A glow, which she persuaded herself was due to the noble emotion of pardon, warmed her heart and half healed its wounds.

"Forgive the boy!" the imps whispered again. "Try to be more complaisant so that he shall not need to go to other women. It lies in your own hands."

She accepted the suggestion gladly and began to look forward with a kind of rapture to pardoning him and receiving his caress of gratitude. Poor Loutfi! He had looked so ashamed and was probably dreading to meet her! She would be kind and affectionate and behave as though nothing had happened.

The thrill that followed was too evidently of the senses to be mistaken, and for one brief moment she was aware that what she was attributing to the grandeur of pardon was really nothing but the pleading of desire. For the first time in her life, so defenceless had her soul's flight left her, Clare was on the verge of being a hypocrite!

The footman came to tell her that luncheon



was served, and she pulled herself together. Her English instincts of self-control forbade her to make her grief public, so she went to the mirror and looked at her face to see if it bore any traces of suffering. She succeeded in smoothing the lines between her brows, but something remained in her eyes which was new to her and not pleasant. Then she went to her room, arranged her hair, changed her kimono for a morning dress and went to the dining-room.

Loutfi was not there.

She sent the footman to his room with a message that she awaited him, thinking that perhaps he was afraid to meet her; but the man brought back word that he was out, and that Henri, his valet, had orders to pack his clothes and take them to Florence at once.

For a moment she had a fresh revolt. What! He had so little consideration for her and for appearances that he went away like that, openly proclaiming their quarrel to all the household! She felt humiliated for him and for herself.

But speedily the imps silenced her. Since the servants knew she might as well profit by it! So she sent for Henri and asked him where his master was gone. He told her he had orders to

take his things to the Grand Hotel as soon as possible.

She felt more and more humiliated. So he had not only proclaimed their rupture to her own servants but to the whole town! She was not wont to care what people thought about her, but the fact of his leaving her roof and going to a hotel would be a public scandal. The imps of desire told her that at all costs she must put a stop to it.

So she went to the telephone and asked for communication with the Grand Hotel, demanding of the porter if Prince Sabaheddine were there.

Yes, the man replied, the Prince was at that moment having luncheon in the restaurant.

"Tell him that Princess Sabaheddine is at the telephone and wants to speak to him for an instant."

A moment later he was there. "Is it you, Clare?" he demanded, in a voice which the imps told her was ashamed and wistful.

"Yes, it is I. Why did you leave like that without telling me?"

"I left because I was ashamed," the voice replied.

Her heart gave a throb of joy even in the midst of her pain. She had been afraid he would



be defiant or insolent and that she would have no excuse to pardon him.

So she called back through the telephone in a clear voice so that there should be no mistake. "Come back, dear boy, at once. I wait for you!"

CHAPTER V

A MONTH had passed and things were going peacefully, outwardly at least, at the Schifanoia. Loutfi had no desire to quarrel with his wife.

Though his passion had cooled, the Orestes sentiment of trust and reliance still remained, and besides, careless though he was, he would have been ashamed of so early a rupture in the eyes of the world and his benefactress, Mrs Potter. Perhaps even a stronger tie than either of these was his senseless and ever-growing jealousy of Maryx.

So he had sworn on the tomb of his fathers that his liaison with Elena was the merest, most harmless flirtation, that she tutoyé-d every man she met, and called him "cheri," and that he had never received the smallest favour from her. Clare was inclined to believe him, for she knew that Elena was dependent on a rich marriage, which a scandal with a married man would



inevitably prevent. She persuaded herself therefore that to ignore the whole affair, and to go on receiving her as though nothing had happened, was the most high-minded attitude to take, and her desire not to quarrel with Loutfi blinded her to her own pusillanimity.

Loutfi did not seem so anxious to leave Florence as he had been, and she liked to think it was because he wished to please her. He went on living the same life as before, except that he exercised a little more discretion. He absented himself nearly every day without saying where he went, and she was too proud to ask for fear he should think her suspicious. When he was with her he was sometimes caressing, sometimes indifferent, according to his mood; but however he behaved she received it with wifely submission, and when he was long absent, longed for his return with the morbid sentimentality of Tennyson's Mariana. To sum up, she was learning to behave like a normal wife.

Finding work impossible she accepted a few of the invitations which were showered upon her and accompanied her husband to dinners, balls, and theatres. When she was present he and Elena behaved discreetly, for Loutfi had told her of the episode of the letter, and it was contrary to

her policy to quarrel with Clare. The Florentines and Anglo-American colony amused themselves thoroughly at her expense, and talked of nothing else but their duplicity and her extraordinary blindness.

She had seen Maryx only twice during the whole month, for Loutfi had made her violent scenes of jealousy on each occasion—scenes which two months ago would have revolted her, but which now she passed over with an indulgent "Poor boy! It's his Oriental blood! He can't help it!" and a secret satisfaction that he cared for her enough to be jealous.

In spite of his caresses and her voluntary blindness she could no longer hide from herself that his passion for her was extinguished. He was too sure of her, she thought sadly, and now that her own senses were awakened it was he, not she, who had the influence. At times she had the most distressing consciousness of failure, of deterioration, and even inferiority, and when she sat idly smoking in her study and the neglected writing-table and bookcases caught her eye, a stinging pang of remorse would shoot through her, which was the most painful sensation she had ever known.

She, who had been so strong, so serene, so



free from earthly passions, that Ferdinand had laughingly compared her to the classic rock in storm-tossed waters, had become the sport of every emotion. At one moment she would be hysterically gay, the next languid and depressed, now apathetic, now irritable and nervous. She could hardly recognize in this mood-tormented neurasthénique the equable and steadfast woman of six months ago.

One morning she was sitting in her room drinking her coffee when some one tapped sharply at the door. She recognized her husband's knock, and her heart beat with expectancy and pleasure.

"Come in!" she called out eagerly.

Loutfi entered in the costume in which he was most irresistible—the pale turquoise silk suit which set off to such advantage his gold curls and fresh skin. He held a telegram in his hand and had an angry look in his blue eyes.

"Look here, Clare! Isn't it damnable?" he began. "My mother is dying, and I've got to go to Egypt at once! What an infernal bore, isn't it?"

"Princess Melek! I didn't know she was ill. What's the matter?"

"Oh, I suppose she's overeaten herself as usual," he answered irritably. "She's had two

strokes already, you know—all due to that. The bore is that I've got to go!"

Clare was shocked and a little disgusted in spite of her indulgence.

"Oh, Loutfi! Poor Princess Melek!" she began, but her husband cut her short.

"Don't let us have any sentimental humbug," he said brutally; "I can't pretend to break my heart over her illness. She's never thought about me. But it's an infernal bore having to leave Florence just now——"

"Well, you'll have to make the best of it," she said a little severely, "for of course you must go."

"Of course I must go—that's certain—and at once, or my thieves of cousins will grab all the ready money. She must have millions put by. I've telephoned to Cook. There's a boat that touches at Naples to-morrow morning, so I must leave to-day. Tell them to have lunch early."

And with that he went out quickly, banging the door behind him.

Soon after lunch, when she was in her study, she heard the throb of the automobile at the door, and presently Loutfi entered the room in his travelling things. He was smoking a big cigar, which he took from his lips as he approached,



and, stooping, gave her a little perfunctory kiss on the forehead.

"I'm going now!" he said. "Good-bye, Clare!"

"But, Loutfi," she answered surprised, "the train doesn't go till half-past five, and it's not three yet."

"I know that," he replied quickly, "but I've got business at the Bank."

"Well, wait a minute, dear boy, and let me come with you. I won't be a second putting on my things."

"No, no!" he said peremptorily; "I'd much rather you didn't. I've got some very boring business that will take a long time, and it would irritate me to think you were waiting."

"All right, then," she returned. "I'll meet you at the station at half-past five."

"No—not that either!" he said more peremptorily still; "I detest station good-byes! Don't bother me, Clare—I've got worries enough without that! Promise you won't come!"

"Of course I won't if you don't want me," she replied disappointed. And she put her hands on his shoulders and looked wistfully into his eyes. He turned away hastily.

"Good-bye!" he said, as if he were a little ashamed of himself. "I'll wire directly I arrive and let you know how things go. Good-bye, Clare!"

And he kissed her hastily, hurried out and got into the limousine, throwing the address of the Bank in the Via Tornabuoni to the chauffeur as he did so.



CHAPTER VI

LOUTFI did not go to the bank. As soon as the automobile had turned into the high-road, he called through the tube to the chauffeur, and directed him to go instead to the Palazzo Davanti. He knew that he should find Elena, for they lunched late, and she rarely went out before four. It was not yet more than three, so he had two full hours before the departure of the train.

He found her in the little boudoir adjoining the salon, smoking her eternal cigarette. She was surprised at his visit, as he had told her not to expect him before five.

"You, cheri!" she exclaimed, when the servant had shut the door. "Quelle chance! What brings you here so early?"

"My mother is dying," he said hurriedly, "and I have to leave for Cairo this afternoon. I came to say good-bye to you."

A gleam of triumph blazed in her eyes. How splendidly fate was working for her she thought,

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as she murmured a few conventional words of sympathy.

He came closer. "Elena! Beloved!" he said pleadingly, all his heart in his passionate voice. "You know how I adore you! You will not let me go away like this—mad with love—unsatisfied! Be good to me! I implore you—Elena! This last hour be mine!"

He was trembling with emotion, his eyes vehemently entreating, his arms half open, waiting for her consent. But it was not at all in Elena's plan to yield herself thus lightly. Following Mephisto's counsel to Kathrinchen, she was quite decided to give him nothing till the ring was on her finger. So she replied, feigning a virtuous resistance—

"But, cheri, you are mad to ask me like that! You know I love you, but I am jeune fille after all! You may kiss me if you like, but no more."

It was the secret of her hold over him—this chaste unchastity, this luring on and casting back, this teasing, tantalizing game she had been playing for a month.

His mouth twitched convulsively, and he came closer to her. "Elena!" he cried, his voice vibrating with passion, "I cannot go away



like this—unsatisfied! *I cannot!* Do you hear! A kiss is not enough! Have pity——”

She looked at him and saw that he was trembling all over. “How these Orientals love!” she thought. “They flare up like benzine!” But she did not take warning from her simile, and showed no sign of yielding.

He threw himself on his knees at her feet and buried his burning face in her lap.

“Elena—have pity——”

She looked down at the curly gold head as a victor might look on a vanquished foe, but bestowed no caress. Now that the fruit was ripe and ready to drop into her lap she must be firmer than ever. He must leave her unsatisfied, so that his one thought should be to return to her and pour his heritage at her feet. She prided herself on understanding men.

So she drew her dress from his grasp and rose.

“Get up, Loutfi, and be reasonable!” she said in a voice new to him, cold and almost harsh. He looked up and read her refusal in her eyes. He rose impetuously and came near her, his lips quivering, his eyes blazing like coals.

“Be reasonable, Loutfi, voyons!” repeated the girl, drawing back; “I could be your wife, not your mistress! I bear a great name,

remember! I am fond of you—you know that! But I have told you from the first and I repeat it now—I can give you nothing—nothing—ever—unless——” she paused significantly.

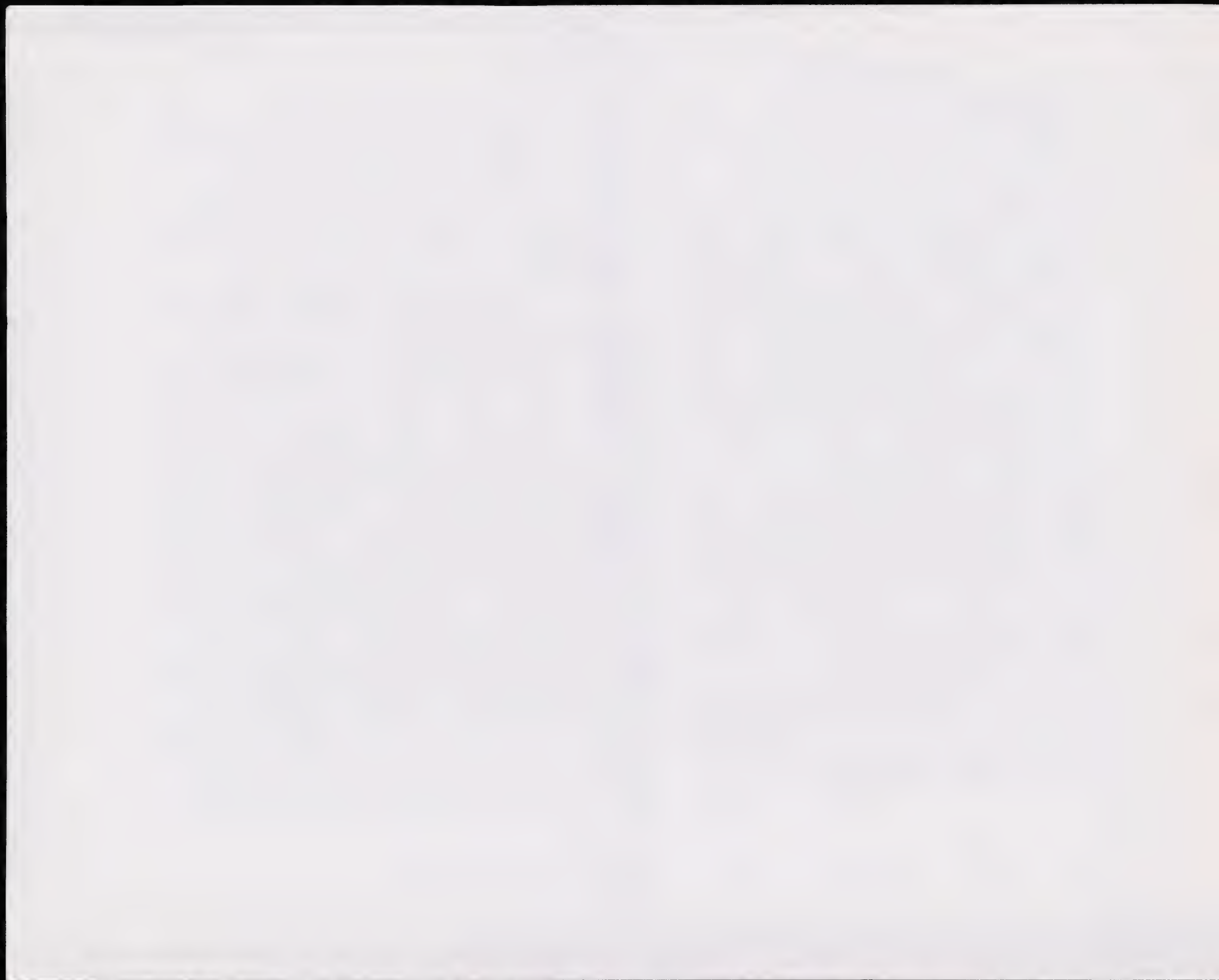
“Unless I leave my wife!” he panted. “Well, God help me, *I cannot* do it! I have no excuse!”

“Bene!” she said with a little indifferent shrug which maddened him. “It rests with you!”

Suddenly, without warning, he seized her in his arms, and she felt them tighten round her like a vice. His whole body throbbed and vibrated with the intensity of his passion. His hot breath scorched her face.

“By God, you shall be mine!” he swore, pressing his lips on hers with such force that their teeth clashed. “You have played with me long enough!”

The attack was so unexpected that for the moment she was staggered. He looked so formidable that she became aware of the peril she ran, and shouted at the top of her voice, “Carlo! Carlo!” Loutfi clapped his hand on her mouth to stop her cries, and for a moment they wrestled together silently. Elena was strong and almost a match for him, but passion lent him force. The



veins stood out on his forehead like cords, his bloodshot eyes started from their sockets. The savage was unchained in him, and who knows what might have been the result of the struggle had not his arms been suddenly seized from behind and dragged forcibly back. Carlo, in his room on the other side of the house, had heard his sister's shrill cry, and had come to the rescue in the nick of time.

"Sabaheddine!" he exclaimed angrily, "what is the meaning of this brutality? Are you mad?"

The boy fell back panting and glared at them both like a beast robbed of its prey. Elena smoothed out her ruffled plumage and speedily resumed her reasoning powers. Her heart was beating furiously, her muscles were aching, but her first thought was, what advantage could be got out of the disagreeable incident?

Carlo, with Loutfi's arm still in his grasp, looked from one to the other waiting for his cue. He was furious at the attack on his sister, but master enough of himself to await her orders as to what attitude he should take. She did not make him wait long.

"Let him go, Carlo!" she said, after a moment, during which she forced herself to be calm. Then, turning to Loutfi, whose fury was

beginning to give place to shame, she added quietly, "What a brute you are, Loutfi! You hurt me horribly! See what you've done!" And she held out her bruised wrist with the fretfulness of a child that has been hurt in play.

The trifling rebuke brought him to his senses quicker than any amount of tragic invective. His anger subsided before the trivial words and he felt humiliated and ridiculous.

Reading his discomfiture in his eyes she pursued her advantage and went on, as she arranged her hair before the mirror: "Isn't he abominable, Carlo? He attacks me like a savage just because he's furious at having to go to Egypt! As if it's my fault!"

Then turning to Loutfi, who was feeling like a whipped schoolboy, she added, as if she were speaking to a naughty child, "Say you are sorry and swear you will never behave like that again!"

Who could maintain a heroic attitude under such puerile correction? His face was crimson, his eyes were flashing, and he was still panting for breath, but his reason had returned sufficiently to make him regret his maniacal attack and to be sensible of the ridiculous figure he cut.

Carlo stood by, hardly understanding his



sister's game. In spite of his frivolity all his racial instincts were up in arms to punish the man who had insulted her, but he was accustomed to follow her lead blindly, so he controlled himself and waited for her next move.

She seemed quite to have recovered her normal state. She had arranged her disordered clothes and the only marks of the struggle were on her bruised wrists.

"Ring the bell and tell them to bring some tea, Carlo!" she said, as though nothing had happened! "I'm thirsty, and Loutfi must have some before he goes to the station. You know he leaves by the half-past five train."

Then following her brother as he went towards the bell, she said in a whisper, "Don't quarrel, but don't leave me alone with him—remember!"

Then she sat down, struck a match and lighted a cigarette, giving Loutfi time to recover himself, and after a few minutes turned to him as though he were paying an ordinary visit and began to ask him in the most natural manner about his journey and Egypt. It ten minutes he found himself drinking his tea and talking of life on a dahabeah as though nothing out of the way had happened. His heart was throbbing with

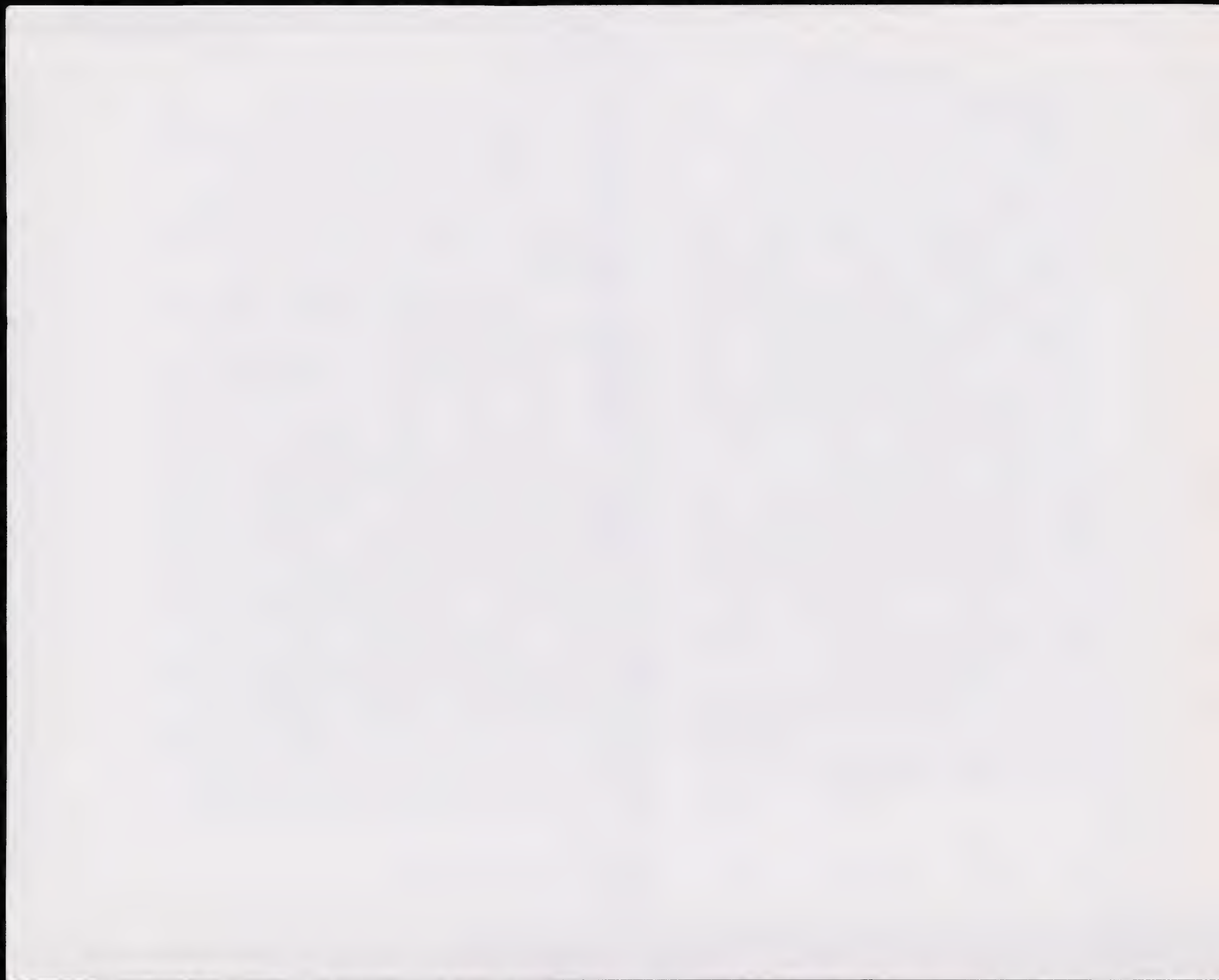
desire and shame and he felt bitterly humiliated, but he could not help admiring this woman, so completely mistress of herself, who had dominated him, and he fell more madly in love with her than ever. He could not tear himself away and sat watching her hungrily, absorbed in his emotions, till the clock striking five warned him that he must soon leave.

He got up with a sigh and bent over her hand. Carlo had discreetly retired to the other end of the room on pretence of looking for a cigar. "You forgive me?" the boy whispered in a low passionate voice, pressing his lips on the bruised wrists.

"Altro! Of course I forgive you!" she murmured tenderly, with a glance that made him thrill. Then in a voice audible to him only—a voice full of seductive promise—she added, "Remember, cheri! It rests with you——!"

* * * * *

That night when she went to bed she looked at her wrists, swollen and purple with the marks of his fingers. She took some cotton-wool and cold cream and bound them up with a little contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, saying as she did so, "Zut! After all, it's a good



omen! Veni, vedi, vici! Cæsar bruised his knees when he landed in Britain!"

She was not quite sure that it was Cæsar, but n'importe! It was some one who had conquered the hated Briton!

CHAPTER VII

AFTER her husband's departure Clare had time and to spare for self-analysis. For the first three days she felt more than ever like Mariana in the Moated Grange, missed him at every turn, and could hardly bear to see his empty chair at meals or to pass the closed door of his rooms. "It's horrible to have grown so dependent!" she thought. "I who used, even at Bebek, to value solitude so much! Now I'm no better than Sibyl and the rest, who can't be alone for five minutes without feeling suicidal. What a change!"

She was indeed changed. So far from being able to work she could not even look at a book without effort, and her literature consisted, like Loutfi's, of the morning papers and a few novels. The galleries and churches knew her no more, nor the bridle-paths among the hills. She went for aimless excursions in the automobile, ordering the chauffeur to go at a pace which would have



satisfied even Mrs. Potter, but which she found too slow for her restless mood. When she was indoors she smoked constantly, finding the tobacco calm her nerves somewhat. She caught herself several times wishing that Princess Melek would die quickly so that Loutfi might come back to her, but even so, she thought with a pang, he would have to stay in Egypt at least a month to settle his affairs—such a heritage as his mother's was not transferred in a day, and then there was the long journey back! At the lowest calculation she had five weeks' loneliness to look forward to—five long dreary weeks. How should she bear them!

One morning she was pacing up and down her study smoking as usual, and feeling wretchedly low and dispirited. The winter sun was beginning to shine into the room, and a pale gold ray suddenly struck on a bronze head against a porphyry background which hung opposite the window and attracted her attention. It was a reproduction, which she had had done some months before, of the bust of Mantegna in his own burial-chapel in Mantua. In the light of the sunbeam the rugged leonine head with its concentrated energy seemed intensely alive, and the stern eyes seemed to flash out a rebuke

beneath the fringe of hair circled with the crown of bayleaves. She stood for a moment gazing at it as though it were some spectre of the past.

"He, too, suffered," she said to herself. "He, too, was pierced by the arrows of life. But he kept his energies up to the end. And she looked at her own face in the mirror with bitter recognition of the lacklustre eye and weary expression she saw there. Then with the languid step which had become habitual to her she went to her writing-table and took out a portfolio so long neglected that she had to search among the numerous drawers before she found it. She put it on the table and began to turn over the sheets till she found a large photograph representing Mantegna's Saint Sebastian of the Louvre, the noble athlete to whom he has given his own features. As she looked she remembered the remark made by Loutfi the day she had taken him to the Museum. "What a ridiculous figure!" he had mocked. "It's like nothing but a pin-cushion."

How his trivial mind had betrayed itself in that speech! His attitude of mockery was one of his worst defects, but she had grown so used to it of late that she had almost ceased to notice it. Now as she looked at the grand figure she



had a revolt against him and her own disloyalty towards the things she had loved. To this man, incapable of even recognizing nobility, finding in it only a butt for his gibes, she had enslaved herself, forsaking all that is of value in life for the sake of his blue eyes and gold hair. The fog that veiled her soul seemed to clear suddenly and an overwhelming disgust at her own degradation seized her.

Her grip on life was lost for ever, and for what! Her influence over him was gone. She had not even succeeded in winning his respect, nor in retaining such pseudo love as he was capable of giving. Her sacrifice had been worse than useless since she had damaged herself for no good. All the gifts she had cast at his feet had been spurned away as rubbish, and meanwhile her own soul was dead—that was the only result!

Then as she sat, vaguely watching the light play on the noble features of the bronze bust, a thought struck her. "Ferdinand!" she exclaimed with a gleam of hope, "I will see Ferdinand! I will tell him everything as if he were my confessor. He will understand and help me—if any one can!"

Her first impulse was to ask him to come to her as he used to do when she needed his help in

her work. But she, formerly so indifferent to the gossip of servants, thought it might seem strange to receive him directly after her husband's departure, now that his visits had become so rare. Yet she must see him alone, and at Castel di Poggio there were always people. Finally she decided to ask him to meet her at a cypress grove half way between their two houses, a spot they both knew well and loved for its classic beauty.

She called him to the telephone and made her request. He replied that he would come with pleasure, and they arranged to meet at half-past two, since the days were so short.

She was too restless to wait till the appointed hour, so she ate a hasty lunch, called Claudine to follow her, and taking the path through the bosco, strolled slowly up the cart-track, worn deep with ruts, which winds among the quarries of Monte Ceccioli. The air was sharp and fragrant with the clean smell of the rotting pine-needles, and the sun, hot for the season, drew out the aroma of the evergreens. The tinkle of the quarrymen's hammers, which used always to set her humming the air of the Nibelungs, fell rhythmically on her ear, and there were still clusters of black berries among the lustrous leaves of the bays and myrtles. But the sights and smells she used to love were



unheeded now, or if she noticed them at all, it was with a stab of pain at her lost powers of appreciation.

Arrived at the grove of ancient cypresses which was their place of rendezvous, she found that she was too early, so she wrapped her furs round her, and sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree by the side of the mountain torrent, which was now trickling soberly enough round the wet boulders in its bed. She leant her back against a moss-grown crag from the clefts of which a myrtle bush had pushed its scented leaves, and crushing some of them in her strong white fingers inhaled their pungent smell. Like the sharp odour of ammonia it seemed to clear her mind and invigorate her.

"You here already! Am I late?" called out the voice of Ferdinand behind her.

Directly she saw him she began to realize the difficulties of her confession, and to gain time she held out to him the crushed leaves. "Isn't it a good smell!" she said, as he took his seat on the rock beside her. "So soothing and healing!"

Her words betrayed her suffering, and a pang of compassion filled him for this woman who used to be so free-souled and strong. What wound had she that needed healing?

"Yes," he said, falling in with her mood. "No perfume is so good as our Italian foliage. Roses and lilies are sweet and only cloy, this aromatic smell invigorates."

"Ferdinand!" she went on after a moment's silence, "do you remember how you founded the Order of the Bay-Leaf on Nietzschean principles when we were all young and enthusiastic? How long ago it seems! I remember so well your address at the ceremony of initiation. It was a tirade against the sins of weakness and false pity. No one might join the Order who was not invulnerable. Josephine with her tender heart was blackballed naturally, I came next, and one by one all the Knights and Dames dropped out or were ejected, and finally your sense of honour made you condemn yourself. But one finds as one gets older that Nietzsche is right. Nothing weakens the soul so much as misplaced pity."

She paused, looking down into the trickling water, and Ferdinand watched her, noticing her lassitude and dejection with sympathy. It was some time since he had seen her and he was surprised at the change. He had never seen the energetic comrade of his youth in this mood.

"The punishment is swift," she went on in a



low voice, after a moment. "And what punishment—Dio mio!"

"Tell me," said Ferdinand gently, divining for what reason she had called him to her. "Tell me. Perhaps I can help you."

Then, still looking down at the water as though she were ashamed to meet his eyes, she told him all, from the fatal night of her promise to the incident of Elena's note. She told him of the gradual weakening of her mind, of the gradual stirring of her senses, until now they held her in their bondage like a slave. She told him of the decline of Loutfi's love, and of her own abasement—not seeking to spare herself, but laying her soul bare before him solemnly as a sick man tells the physician his disease. When she had finished she looked at him and said, "Now tell me what to do to regain what I have lost."

He was silent for some minutes meditating. Something of what she had told him he had feared when he heard of the ill-assorted marriage, only he had hoped more from her strength and steadfastness. He knew what he had to say, but sought for words to say it without deepening the wounds of her soul.

"Yes," he began at last, "it is the old story of the ivy and the oak. The weaker destroys

the stronger that gives it nourishment. You have renounced your birthright, allowed your personality to be sapped—weakened—till it is on the verge of disappearing altogether. Do you remember what Maeterlinck says? 'Do not give away the oil of your soul, but only the flame that is fed by it!' You have poured out the oil of your soul, Clare—wasted it, alas! for it nourishes no other flame."

He paused and she sat gazing down into the water.

"I wonder if you believe as I do," he went on, trying to say what he had to say with the least possible humiliation to her, "that the soul is at war with the senses—that is to say, that like a king with unruly subjects, it must insist always on its supremacy?"

"I used to be sure of it," she answered; "but lately it has seemed to me that I owe to them some of the most glorious and splendid moments of my life. Now I feel bewildered. I don't know which is true."

"Ah—don't mistake those flashes of intoxication for glory and splendour," he said gently. "They are deceptive flashes stolen from the soul, excesses during which we exhaust in one flare the oil which should have served us for a month."



The flame dies down swiftly, and leaves nothing but lassitude behind—you know that——”

“And yet life is incomplete without love——”

“Without love—yes? But it must be love not desire. It is one of the worst defects of modern speech that we employ one word for sentiments so antagonistic as love and desire. The two have absolutely nothing in common.”

“That is true,” she said, “but how few people realize it.”

“They blind themselves voluntarily. It is the unconscious homage of the lower to the higher. Every one prefers to be a god rather than a beast and words have a strange importance. People would be ashamed to see written what they do as a matter of course.”

“Then it has all been wasted!” Clare went on after a pause, during which he was wondering how he could best encourage her.

“Nothing is ever wasted,” he replied. “You exacted too much from your strength when you allowed false pity to weaken your reason. You erred when you allowed your senses to enslave your soul. That is past. Let it go without regret. It is never too late to retrieve a false step. Even if the spark is extinguished, the Divine Fire burns always at which to rekindle it.

Meet your husband when he comes back on the only meeting-ground possible between you—that of affection. So will you help to develop his soul and raise him to your level.”

“I fear it is impossible,” she said sadly, rising, for the sun was beginning to sink behind the trees. “He mocks when I speak of the soul. We have no language in common.”

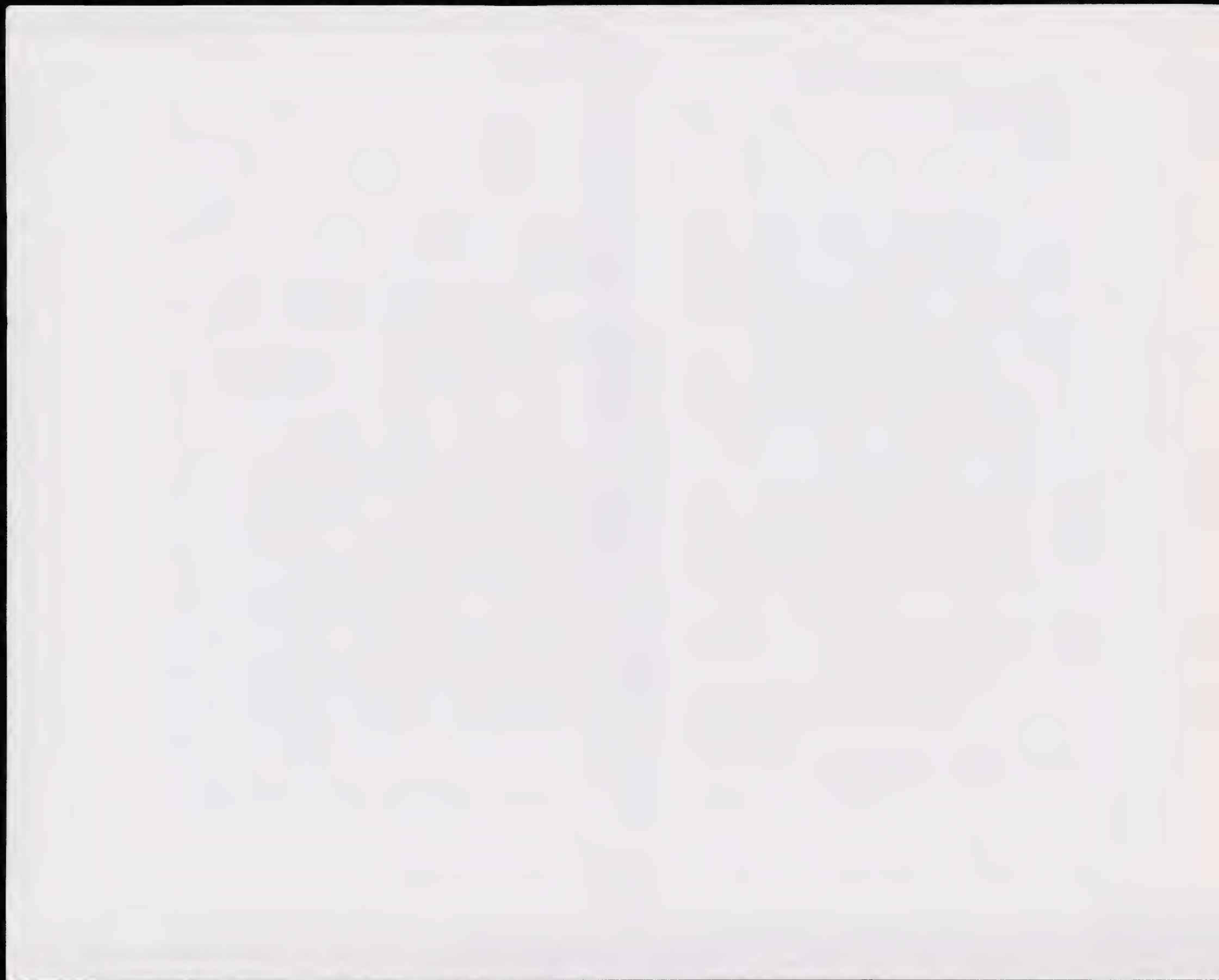
“Language is not needed,” he replied. “Cultivate the soul in you in silence and it will command respect and ensure its own sway.”

He put his arm round her affectionately as he stood by her side, deeply touched at the sorrow that had overtaken her.

“Dear Clare!” he said, bending over her, “I wish I could help you. We’ve been friends so long and I hate to see you suffer like this.”

She put her head on his shoulder for a moment, soothed by the peace of his comprehension and sympathy.

A sound of voices on the hill on the other side of the stream roused them both, and he drew his arm quickly away, fearful that their attitude would be seen and misconstrued. On the road above, which followed the windings of the valley, two people—a man and a woman—were walking,



and had he and Clare been less absorbed they must have heard their voices and laughter.

"Donna Elena Davanti and Guido Montorsoli!" he exclaimed, recalled to actualities by their appearance. He hoped with all his heart that they had not seen him with his arm round Clare! The place was as a rule so solitary that the thought of anybody passing on the road above had never entered his head.

Clare paid no attention. She was absorbed still in his words and her own reflections, and was feeling happier than she had been for months in the fresh energy and hope he had inspired.

* * * *

That evening Elena, returning from a long day spent at her cousin's villa in the valley below Monte Ceccioli, burst like a whirlwind into Carlo's room, where he was reckoning up his debts with despair in his soul. "Evviva la vita!" she cried at the top of her high voice. "Certainly the gods are on our side! She's in my power—the ice-princess—from henceforth! Leave your papers, Carlo, and listen to what I saw this afternoon!"

"What is it?" he grumbled, very upset at the result of his calculations and the enormous deficit in his banking account. "You've always

got some maggot in your brain! All I know is that we're both on the verge of ruin!"

"Both on the verge of wealth—unlimited wealth!" she retorted, radiant. "Listen, imbecile! Guido and I were walking home from Maria's villa this afternoon, and by the merest chance had taken the path above the Mensola, when who should we see in the valley below but Clare—the iceberg Clare—melting in the arms of Ferdinand Maryx! She had her head on his shoulder and he was embracing her and gazing into her eyes as though he wanted to eat her! What do you think of that! It's always the way with these English—hypocrites that they are! I knew she couldn't be the statue she seemed! But think, Carlo mio, what splendid luck that I should have chosen that road instead of the shorter one. It was the merest chance! And now how charmed Loutfi will be when I tell him! He always declares he has no excuse for leaving her! He won't be able to say that any more! I can make him divorce her when I like now. Ah, stupid boy! Fling your bills into the Arno and rejoice with me!" And seizing the papers with which the table was littered, she crumpled them all together and threw them into the waste-paper basket.



CHAPTER VIII

IT was the middle of February and the tramontana was roaring noisily through the ravines. The lizards were hibernating, the maple-bushes were burning like flames in their yellow and red winter coats, and the only flowers hardy enough to face the icy blast were the little roses with petals light as a butterfly's wings, which like a girl's delicate cheek grow redder in the cold. At the Schifanoia it seemed hardly winter, for Clare had planted so many of them, and the cypress and ilex trees were so abundant, that the garden was almost as gay as in summer.

She was standing on the terrace overhanging the road, awaiting the automobile which was to bring Loutfi from the station, with a heart full of hope and anxiety. Since her talk with Ferdinand she had made a hard fight to recover her lost ground, and it seemed to her she had, partially at least, succeeded. Something of her old equable temper, much of her moral strength had returned,

and she felt that it rested with her husband for their future together to be fairly happy. She had received several letters from him, so badly expressed that she could gather little from their curt jerky phrases, but he wrote that he felt lost without her, he asked her advice on several points, and in her more optimistic moments it seemed to her that of his own accord he was assuming just the attitude she wished him to take.

As for Loutfi, his feelings had undergone as much change as his fortunes. After he had left Elena his unsatisfied passion had taken him by the throat and seemed to stifle him, but, as is always the case with people of his temperament, it had diminished with absence and occupation. During the voyage from Naples he had felt almost suicidal, and even she would have been satisfied with the result of her Tantalus policy. But on his arrival he had found his mother already dead, and had at first been too busy with the complicated affairs of his heritage to have time for anything else. Later, when he began to realize of what vast wealth he was now master, the horizon of his desires began to expand in proportion, and her image became only one in the crowd of dazzling houris which his Oriental brain conjured up for his delight.



And the houris did not exist only in his imagination. Cairo is not lacking in purchasable beauty of a high order, and the rich young Prince Sabaheddine was besieged with proffers of love, from the English peeress at the Savoy who adored jewels down to the Arab danseuse in the native theatre. Even during his month of mourning he had succeeded in becoming the hero of a scandal which must ultimately finish in the English Divorce Court. Clare had read echoes of it in the *New York Herald*, but she was used to his infidelities, and determined to say nothing to him about it.

When at last the automobile appeared round the curve of the hill her heart beat fast with expectation. It seemed to her a turning-point in her life—as if all their future together depended on this first meeting. He was leaning out of the window and waved her a kiss as soon as he saw her, and even at that distance she noticed how glad and triumphant he looked.

"My darling!" he exclaimed, as he joined her on the terrace. "How glad I am to see you! But Florence looks more dead-alive than ever! Haven't you been horribly bored since I've been away?"

Then without waiting for her to answer he

added, "I hope lunch is ready. I'm dying of hunger!"

She had a little pang of disappointment. It seemed to her that he thought more about his food than her.

They went into the dining-room, and while he was eating he poured out a flood of talk about the gaieties of Cairo, the people he had met on board the P. and O., the amusing time they had had, dancing and playing bridge and baccarat, but he seemed completely to have forgotten his mother's death.

When the servants had left the room he said, his eyes flashing triumphantly—

"You know, Clare, I'm rich now, very rich! It's splendid, isn't it? There's heaps of ready cash besides the income! We'll have a hotel in the Avenue du Bois and a villa in Monte Carlo, and a yacht—do you like yachting? You ought to—all Englishwomen do. And I'm going to keep some polo ponies. I used to play rather well when I was in Vienna. At last I'm able to live—Gott sei dank!"

She felt a little jarred at such exuberance only six weeks after his mother's death, and could not help saying, "Poor Princess Melek!"

He shrugged his shoulders, drank his coffee



without wasting regrets on his deceased parent, and when he had finished came close to her and took her rather perfunctorily in his arms.

"Now I can kiss you," he said. "You know, Clare, I've missed you a good deal!"

Then he held her at arm's length and looked her masterfully straight in the eyes.

"What have you been doing in this dull hole all these long weeks since I left?" he asked. "Have you missed me?"

"Of course I've missed you, dear boy," she answered. "It was awful at first!"

She was so accustomed to be sincere that the last words slipped out unawares, but she saw by his face that she had made a false step.

"Only at first," he echoed suspiciously. "You didn't miss me after, then?"

"Silly boy," she said, caressing his hair; "I missed you all the time, but at first I felt quite mad. One can't keep at that pitch very long—luckily for one's nerves."

He looked only half satisfied. "Tell me what you've been doing—whom you've been seeing?" he went on, with the air of one who has the right to question.

"I've hardly seen any one," she answered, a

little enervated at his tone. "At first I was too sad, and lately I've been too busy."

"Busy—over what?" he asked frowning.

"I've been finishing my book on Mantegna," she replied. "It's going to be published this spring."

He muttered something that sounded like an oath, and then, as though he were ashamed of himself, took her again in his arms and kissed her. She returned his caresses tenderly but without warmth. The scandal hinted at in the *New York Herald* had done as much to cure her passion as her own efforts.

"Look here, Clare," he said, putting his hands on her shoulders and searching her eyes, "you know I have to say everything that's on my mind or else I should burst."

"I know, spoilt child," she said smiling, but with a sinking heart, for she guessed what was coming.

"Well, tell me! Have you been seeing much of that cursed fellow Maryx?"

Clare had never told a lie in her life. The thought of averting his jealousy that way never occurred to her. So she answered, "Yes, silly boy, of course I've seen him."

"Often?"



"Two or three times a week, I suppose."

"Two or three times a week! Why, it's enormous! When I was here he never came. Why did he come as soon as my back was turned—the scoundrel?"

"He didn't come often. Generally I went to him."

"So much the worse. He was afraid he'd been found out, I suppose! Curse him!"

"Loutfi, how unreasonable you are!" she exclaimed, vexed at so early a beginning to the dreaded difficulties. "Ferdinand is one of my oldest friends. He has always helped me with my work—all I know I've learnt from him. You can't expect me to give him up just because you've taken it into your head to be unreasonable. He's been helping me with my book."

"Aman! It's the old story of my being too ignorant for you! Always that infernal art! I'm sick of it! You don't seem to care a bit that I've come back nor that I've got all this money! Most wives would be mad with joy! I wish to God you were more human!"

"But I *am* glad—very glad, dear boy," she said affectionately; "and, Loutfi, *please* don't let us quarrel the minute you've arrived—and over such stupid things! It's horrible to me that you

should take my friendship with Ferdinand like that—a friendship of fifteen years, remember!"

"Look here, Clare!" he said, swinging round abruptly and planting himself before her with the masterful expression still in his eyes, "you care for me a bit, don't you?"

"Of course I care, many bits, dear boy!"

"Well, look here! I *can't* stand that fellow Maryx, with his superior airs, making love to you under the pretence of talking art! It's been on my mind all the time I've been away. I don't see why, if you really love me, you should let me be worried like that. Now I'm going to put your love to the test! If you really care for me as you say, you will do what I'm going to ask you!"

"What is it?" she asked, dreading the answer.

"Give up seeing him altogether!"

"Loutfi, you are mad!" she exclaimed. "Give up seeing one of my oldest friends for no reason whatever!"

"Isn't it reason enough that it irritates *me*?" he said, with masculine egotism; "isn't it reason enough that I ask you—that I beg you—implore you——?" There was more command than pleading in his tone.



"No!" she said with decision, "it is not enough for doing a thing so absurd and unjust! Don't ask me impossibilities!"

He turned away sulkily. "Ah!" he muttered, "I knew he would get hold of you when I left! Damn the fellow!"

After a moment he returned to the charge. "Clare!" he said, this time in a coaxing voice, "why *won't* you do what I ask? I tell you I've been worrying about it ever since I've been away and it's my first day!—*Please!*"

He begged with the trivial anxiety of a child asking for a toy. She felt hopeless how to deal with such a mentality.

Legitimate jealousy was comprehensible, but to be jealous without passion, capricious for the sake of caprice, and exacting for the sake of domineering, was insupportable! To sacrifice so priceless a thing as a proved friendship just to satisfy his despotic senses of ownership was out of the question, but it was odious to her to begin quarrelling the moment he came back.

"Clare!" he urged, "please—promise me!"

"Loutfi, my child—I cannot! It would be monstrous!"

Her maternal tone irritated him profoundly. "You won't do even that much to please me—

my first day?" he said with an injured air. "Really, Clare, I thought I could count more on your love! After all, it's not much to ask! It can't matter whether you see him or not if you aren't in love with him!"

"Loutfi, don't be so unreasonable!" she said, almost inclined to smile at such total ignoring of any other tie than desire. Then to put a stop to his insistence, she added, going towards the door: "Come and look at the roses I put up for you. Your room looks like a Hortus Inclusus by Botticelli."

"Damn Botticelli!" he muttered, following her sulkily. To him the Florentine painter was inextricably mixed up with Ferdinand Maryx.

Things were certainly beginning badly—worse than she had anticipated in her most pessimistic moments. Either she must give in to his caprice and be henceforth a slave to every whim, or she must fight for her independence. It would be a hard tussle, she foresaw, for his good fortune had evidently made him more headstrong and despotic than ever.

He did not recover his temper till the next day at lunch, when he began telling her all he meant to do with his money. He expected her to come to Paris at once to look out for a hôtel,



and said that he had telephoned to Cook that morning for their tickets. When she remonstrated at such haste, and told him she could not possibly leave Florence for the moment, he turned sulky again, and finally accused her of wanting to stay because of Ferdinand.

His fingers were itching to begin spending, and every day passed in Florence seemed to him abominable waste of time. She tried to be indulgent, persuading herself that he had been dependent so long that it was comprehensible, but she could not blind herself to the fact that with his wealth his egotism had increased by strides and leaps. His temper was more variable than ever, and his moods alternated between the most exuberant spirits, when he would talk as if the world belonged to him, and fits of boredom when he said he felt suicidal.

Following the line of conduct she had laid down for herself, she treated him with unvarying affection, trying to regain her influence over him without anger or correction, but she had to deal with a Loutfi in whom the devils of caprice had multiplied seventy times seven. Her attitude, which he condemned as patronizing, irritated him more than if she had shown temper, and more than ever he resented what he called her damned

indifference. She would do nothing he asked her, and what was money for if it cannot give immediate satisfaction of all one's desires!

He had taken it into his head that now he was rich she must give up Florence and her villa and follow him meekly in all his plans, and he left her no peace in his efforts to persuade her that such a small unfashionable town was no place for the wife of a millionaire. She could not make him understand that she lived there because she loved it, and that his wealth would in no way change her mode of life.

Every day, every hour he returned to the charge, and teased her alternately with the persistence of a spoiled child, and the hectoring assurance of a master. He seemed not the least to mind being thought a bore, nor could he be induced to believe that his insistence was useless. It was always the same story, and he grew more pressing still when he received his Egyptian letters regaling him with accounts of his wealth, the vast number of his feddans and the piles of ready cash in the bank waiting to be spent.

The terms of his attack hardly ever varied. "Look here, Clare," he would say, coming into her study with a bundle of letters, "how long do you mean to go on staying in this beastly



hole? It's madness! I *must* go to Paris! Say when you will come—to-morrow?"

And every day she would answer, "But, Loutfi, I have told you that I can't come away yet. Why won't you go without me, and I will join you when I can?"

And he would turn sulky, and mutter half under his breath, "Of course, as long as that infernal Maryx is here you will stay!"

The phrase returned with the regularity of a refrain, but as it was always more or less sotto voce she pretended for several days to ignore it. It got too much on her nerves, however, and once she rebuked him so severely that, seeing him flush, she regretted her harshness. But the flush was of rage not of shame, and the next day he returned to the charge with renewed vigour.

She wondered how long such a life between them would be supportable.

She had not even such consolation as might have been extracted from the thought that he wanted her to be with him because he loved her, for since his return he had made it evident that his passion for her had completely died out. He wanted her, partly because he was proud of her, as Ahasuerus was proud of Vashti, but chiefly because he could not bear the thought of leaving

her with Ferdinand. His was a dog-in-the-manger jealousy. "This is my bone, and though I'm tired of it no other dog shall have it."

To keep the peace, for the first week after his return she had not been to Castel di Poggio, but she chafed terribly under the restriction she put upon herself. It was weak, she knew, but though she detested weakness she detested scenes even more.

One morning she received by the post the photograph of a portrait by Mantegna, which a friend of hers had discovered in an out-of-the-way château in Hungary. The picture was for sale, but it seemed so badly preserved that she was doubtful whether it was worth the important sum demanded. Her first thought, as always in such matters, was to ask Ferdinand's advice, so, forgetting Loutfi's jealousy in her preoccupation, she ordered the pony-cart and drove at once to Castel di Poggio, leaving word that she would be back in the afternoon.

There were several people she knew and liked with the Maryx that day, and the time passed so agreeably that it was nearly time to dress for dinner when she returned. She found Loutfi pacing up and down the loggia which commanded the entrance, his hands buried deep in his trouser



pockets, scowling black as thunder. He hardly waited the departure of the servants to begin his attack.

"So you've been to see that scoundrel Maryx again?"

She felt humiliated at giving the reason of her visit, as though she had not the right to go where she pleased, but for the sake of peace she told him of the portrait she wanted to buy and her need of Ferdinand's advice.

"Oh, la la! Always the excuse of that cursed art!" he exclaimed, contemptuously. "Really, Clare, you'd do well to invent something fresh! I'm getting sick of that lie!"

She was astonished at his insolence. It was the first time he (or any one else for that matter) had ever dared to doubt her word, and it made her blood boil. She turned on him sharply and flashed him a glance which cowed even his arrogance.

"What do you mean by that?" she said, in a voice low but vibrating with anger.

His eyes quailed before hers and he stammered lamely, "Aman! Don't look such a she-devil! I didn't mean any harm, only it's absurd to expect me to believe that you and he talk of nothing but art when you're together! That's rather impossible!"

"There are many things impossible to you to understand!" she said, scornfully, "but I must insist that you never again dare to doubt my word. Your ridiculous jealousy is bad enough to bear, but I absolutely refuse to put up with your insults."

She spoke with such anger that he was intimidated for the time being, and even tried in a shamefaced kind of way to apologize.

"Oignez vilain il vous poindra, poignez vilain il vous oindra." The words apply as much to the prince as to the peasant.

The next evening after dinner he came into her study with a pile of house-agent's letters in his hand, and began as usual to speak of his business in Paris, and the absolute necessity of his presence there. She was getting more and more tired of his importunities, and she had not quite forgiven his insolence of the night before. So when he began with his usual demand that she should fix the day for leaving Florence, she replied less gently than usual.

"Loutfi, dear boy, I'm getting so tired of this talk of hotels and Paris. Since you want to buy it at once, why don't you go by yourself and leave me to come later? I tell you for the hundredth time that I can't leave



Florence for the moment. I have business here."

"Business! I should like to know what business a woman can have!" he retorted contemptuously. "What you call business is only poring over photographs and rubbish and listening to Maryx making love to you!"

A dangerous light came in her eyes, but she mastered her disgust and only said coldly—

"My business is as important to me as yours is to you."

"Oh, of course I understand that," he returned, "as long as that cursed fellow is here!"

"Basta!" she said, raising her hand warningly. "I told you last night and I repeat it again—I will have no more insults!"

But last night she had said it while he was fasting and enervated, and to-night he had dined and was strong with the valour lent by a couple of whiskies and soda. So instead of being intimidated as before he became all the more arrogant.

"Who's to prevent me from saying what I want?" he cried, his face flushed with anger. "Damn your British arrogance! Insult or no insult I say what I choose to my own wife! I'm sick of your governess ways and I refuse to be shut up as if I were a child! I tell you that I

know why you stay on in this beastly hole, and I tell you, too, that as long as you stay I shall stay also!"

He was standing near the table and he accentuated each word with a blow of his clenched fist, which set all the ornaments dancing.

Last night she thought he had been a little ashamed of himself, and here he was repeating the same insults with added virulence. She looked at him hopelessly, not knowing how to deal with him. It was humiliating as well as futile to deny his accusations and a waste of energy and nerve-force to be angry. On what ground was it possible to meet this puerile, undisciplined creature?

She sat musing over the question on one side of the table, with her husband glaring at her from the other. She felt as if all she could say would be like warding the blows of a club with a paper-knife, and that there was but one egress to a situation which had grown intolerable. Life together had been difficult enough at Bebek, but now that his passion, which was all he knew of love, had burnt out, and that his wealth had turned him into a kind of Nero-like despot, two paths only seemed open to her—separation or slavery. For the first time she faced divorce as



the only possible remedy, and was surprised to feel, mingled with the pain of failure, a faint ray of hope.

She glanced at her husband who was eyeing her arrogantly, as usual interpreting her silence as submission, and asked, with an inflection of genuine curiosity in her voice—

"Tell me, Loutfi, since you don't love me any more, why are you jealous of me?"

"I'm not *jealous* of you!" he retorted angrily; "but you're my wife, and I'm damned if you shall ever take a lover as long as I'm alive! I won't have my property thieved under my very nose! That's a humiliation I will never submit to!"

The answer was so frank in its brutality that in the midst of her irritation she felt inclined to smile.

"And suppose I don't accept the position of being your 'property'?"

"It wouldn't alter the fact that you are, since you're my wife!" he replied still more brutally.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, revolted beyond control by his insolence. "Don't assume too much, please, or life together will become impossible!"

"What do you mean by that!" he flashed out.

"I mean that I refuse to submit to such

despotism!" she answered coldly. "I married you in a moment of weakness, but I am no more your *property* than I was before marriage. I belong to myself as much as if you were no longer my husband!"

His face flushed darkly. "You mean that you want to divorce?"

"I should have no difficulty," she answered still more coldly, "after the scandalous affair with Lady Vansittart in Cairo."

The colour deepened in his face but he turned on her defiantly.

"Who told you?" he asked angrily.

"Who told me!" she exclaimed contemptuously. "These are things there is no need to tell! One reads them oneself. It was all in the papers."

"Oh, zut!" he said, with a little complacent shrug of the shoulders. "These affairs don't count! A man can do as he chooses! Besides, it was all rubbish! She threw herself at my head and I had to take her out of pity. I could do no less."

She was too disgusted to answer, and finding that he could not gain his point, he muttered a few oaths and left the room, banging the door behind him.



CHAPTER IX

IN the excitement of the new life he was planning Loutfi had almost forgotten Elena's existence, and nearly a fortnight went by without his seeing her. The possibilities of his future seemed so limitless now, that if he thought of her at all it was only with the complacent feeling that she was there, waiting till he should feel inclined to throw the handkerchief. It never entered into his head that she would persist in her refusal now that he was rich and could satisfy her most extravagant demands, and he had with him one of the poor Princess Melek's pearl necklaces, worth a fabulous sum, with which he intended to buy her when he chose. Only the passion she had roused in him had been slaked by the caresses of Lady Vansittart and other Cairo houris, and the very certainty of her surrender made him less eager to begin the attack.

Elena meanwhile was eating her heart out with anxiety and disappointment. His letters had

ceased after the first week of his absence, but she knew he was a bad correspondent, and had put it down to his preoccupation with business. That his passion, so ungovernable the day of his departure, could have cooled in so short a time never entered her head, for though she prided herself on knowing men, she had no experience of Oriental instability. But now he was back—had been back nearly a fortnight—and she could not understand why he had not been to see her. Something must have happened, for even the most ordinary civility exacted that he should pay her a conventional visit on his return.

So she stayed in every day expecting him to come, prepared to receive him in her most attractive clothes. In vain! Every ring at the bell made her heart beat with hope, and she could hardly hide her disappointment enough to be civil when Guido Montorsoli or another of her numerous flirts was announced instead of the longed-for Loutfi. She hardly dared to stir out of the house for fear she might miss him.

Poor Elena! She had been so triumphant when she had heard of his mother's death, and read in the papers the enormous amount of piastres and feddans he had inherited. She had it all by heart, for she had made Carlo send for an Egyptian



paper, and had read eagerly, as though it already belonged to her, the details of his vast property, to which the *Bourse Egyptienne* daily devoted half a column of its sheet. It had really seemed as though Providence were playing into her hand, and now, just as the much-desired fruit seemed ripe to fall into her lap, something had happened to prevent it! What that something was she could not imagine, and the mystery only increased her anxiety. She did not suspect the truth—namely, that his conquests in Cairo, his jealousy of Maryx, his plans for Paris hotels, Monte Carlo villas, yachts and polo ponies, so filled his mind that her place in it was reduced to a very remote and minute corner.

However, Elena was not made for discouragement. She felt strong to recapture him when she got hold of him, and with her usual energy set about the best way to do it. So when the second week had gone by and still he did not come, she decided, like Mohammed with his mountain, to take the initiative. At first she meditated a call at the villa, but Clare had not been very encouraging of late, and besides her success depended on her seeing him alone. One morning, therefore, when his automobile had been waiting for half an hour outside the old Palazzo in the Via Tornabuoni,

where he had his banking account, she emerged from the modiste's opposite just as he was preparing to get in. He saw her and she waved him a greeting, with a surprised air as though she did not know he was back, and he crossed the street and joined her.

He could not help being struck by her beauty. She looked more brilliant than he had ever seen her in her well-cut tailor clothes, with her flashing eyes, her dark hair, and cheeks and lips just touched with carmine. He had almost forgotten, in his surfeit of Cairo beauties, how attractive she was, and he looked at her with open admiration and gladly accepted her invitation to go back with her to lunch.

Carlo, aware of his sister's plans, was enchanted to see her return with her prey in tow, and as soon after lunch as he decently could, he pleaded an engagement and retired. When they were alone, Elena came and stood over his chair, playing with his hair in her most caressing manner. Not a word of reproach for his neglect did she utter—she knew men too well for that—but she let him feel that she had missed him terribly and was enraptured at his return. The fragrance of her perfume and the contact of her hand re-awakened his slumbering passion, and he felt how



stupid he had been to neglect such a charming pastime in the dearth of amusements, and what a contrast her warmth was to the coldness of his wife. She brought all the battery of her wiles to bear upon him, and with such good effect that by the time he rose to leave she felt with triumph that she had completely resumed her old sway.

Not a day passed during the following week that he did not spend several hours in her boudoir, and he began to find Florence less boring and to watch Clare less jealously. It was the more easy because, worn out with the scenes he made her, she had for the moment given up going to Castel di Poggio.

One day he arrived at the Palazzo Davanti earlier than usual, holding in his hand a dainty parcel tied with a pale pink ribbon. After Carlo had departed and there was no danger of interruption, Elena, who was dying of curiosity, asked him what it was.

"It's for you," he said, untying the ribbon and exposing a white satin écrin. "No—wait!" he added teasingly, withdrawing it from her reach as she stretched out an eager hand. "I think, after all, I won't give it to you. It will only distract your attention from me."

Her eyes were sparkling covetously. "Ah, do let me see it, cheri," she pleaded.

"No—I've changed my mind!" he said, putting the écrin back in his pocket. "After all, I don't think they are good enough for your white neck, although the Cairo jeweller said he had never seen a finer orient."

"Ah! it's pearls!" she exclaimed eagerly. "Oh, cheri, there's nothing in the world I adore like pearls! You *must* give them to me! Quick!"

He shook his head teasingly. It amused him to repay her in her own Tantalus coin.

"No, no. I've changed my mind. They are not worthy of you!"

She flashed her eyes eagerly into his and read his game there. They said more plainly than any words, "If you yield they are yours."

Then a mute skirmish passed between them, swift, but explicit.

"Will you?" his eyes asked.

Hers replied, "I cannot!"

His—"Then no pearls!"

Hers—"I want them—I *must* have them!"

His—"Then yield!"

Presently he added his voice to the attack. "Beloved!" he murmured, in the soft voice he



had found so irresistible since his accession to wealth. "Beloved! I have waited so long——"

"I cannot," she replied, turning her eyes modestly from his. "I cannot—unless——"

"The old story?"

"Cheri, what can I do? It cannot be without that—Carlo would kill me."

He bent over her caressingly.

"But, beloved, he need not know! No one need ever know! Pretend you go to visit a friend, and we will go to Paris or Venice or St. Petersburg—no matter where, so long as we are together! You shall have everything you want—everything! And we will come back here separately—at different times—and no one will know!"

The programme was not at all attractive to Elena, so she contented herself with repeating modestly, "I cannot—without——"

"But, beloved—it is madness! I cannot do it! I have no cause to leave her—no reason to divorce her—even if I would! She is honour itself! She would die rather than deceive me!" It was curious how his jealousy of Maryx went hand in hand with his faith in his wife.

This was the opening Elena had longed for.

"Ah, you think so?" she said sceptically.

"I know it!"

"Hum—m—m!"

"What do you mean—what do you insinuate?" he asked angrily, forgetting his passion for her in the stronger emotion of jealousy.

She was silent.

"What do you mean?" he repeated more violently. "I *will* know!"

"Oh, nothing—I meant nothing!" she replied carelessly.

"You *did* mean something! What is it? No one could breathe a word against Clare's honour! She adores me!"

She smiled a little and looked down at the ground.

"Elena!" he exclaimed angrily, "if you know anything against her, for God's sake say it!"

"What should I know, cheri? Men are so blind and fatuous! But if you think it's all right, of course it is!"

"What is all right?"

"Why—to go for walks with Maryx directly your back is turned, and——"

"And what?"

His face flushed deeply. He had forgotten his desire, the pearls—everything, in the dominating passion of jealousy.



"And what?" he repeated more loudly.

"Well, now I remember—they were not walking——"

"Were not walking—what do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing, cheri!" she answered evasively. "Show me the pearls—*please!*"

"Damn the pearls!" he shouted. "Tell me what you insinuate about my wife and that scoundrel Maryx!"

"Basta! Basta!" she said, pretending to stop her ears, in reality charmed by his fury. "I insinuate nothing—I never insinuate. I saw!"

"Saw what?"

She had had long enough experience of his violence not to irritate him too long, so she decided to bring his torture to an end.

"Well, cheri—it was the very day after you left for Cairo—I remember, because I was so sad, that to cheer myself I had gone to spend the day with my cousins at Monte Ceccioli, and I was walking down the hill towards the tram-road with Guido Montorsoli, when, just as we came to the cliff above the cypress-grove in the Mensola valley—you remember the cypress-grove, cheri?"

He nodded impatiently, and signed to her to continue.

"Well, I heard a sound of voices, and looked down and saw——"

She paused, enjoying her triumph.

"Saw what—damnation?"

"Why your wife and Maryx, of course!"

"My wife and Maryx—the day after I left! What were they doing?"

"Loutfi, don't look so brutal! They were standing——"

"Standing—how?"

She feigned embarrassment, and let her eyelids droop.

"How were they standing—I *will* know?" He brought his clenched fist down with all his force on the table.

She gave a little scared glance, as though she were too frightened to answer.

"Elena! Tell me! How were they standing?"

"Cheri, you look so savage, you frighten me!"

He made an effort to control himself. "Tell me!" he said more quietly.

"What am I to tell you—they were standing—I tell you—they were standing—like any other people who——" She broke off again.

"Who what?" he almost shouted, losing command over himself.



"Who—who—Loutfi—don't look such an assassin! Who—what do you want me to say? You frighten me."

"Say the truth! What were they doing?"

"Well, then—they were standing—he was standing—with——"

"With what—for God's sake." His face was livid.

Elena was thoroughly enjoying the scene and let each additional word drop with the relish of an executioner. She had looked forward to this moment ever since fate had so providentially made her witness to what she genuinely believed to be a love episode. One little drawback, however, marred her complete satisfaction. To be so frantic as that he must care for his wife more than she supposed.

She had worked him up to boiling pitch and he no longer realized what he was doing. He came close to her and seized her wrist with violence. "With what?" he shouted, losing his remnant of self-control.

"Aïe! Loutfi! You hurt me!" she exclaimed with a little scream of pain. "I won't have any more of your violence, savage that you are! I'll call for Carlo again—you impossible creature."

The allusion to his former humiliation recalled him to self-control. "Tell me then! I insist on knowing." He said more calmly.

"Well, if you must know—but mind—I warn you, you won't like it—he was standing with his arm round her waist, and she was leaning her head on his shoulder, and they were gazing into each other's eyes as though they would drag them out of the sockets. But why do you make me tell you if you mind so much?"

She broke off, really alarmed at the effect of her words. His face was almost black and his lips were twitching violently.

"Foolish boy! You *must* have known that they care for each other—that they've cared for each other for years. Why, all Florence knows that!"

She dealt her final stab with such venom that in the midst of his fury Loutfi was struck by it. "It's a lie!" he said furiously. "It's a lie! You invented the whole story to make me divorce her."

"It's no lie!" she answered, with an accent of truth which he was bound to recognize. "If you doubt my word you've only got to ask Guido. He saw them as well as I."

Then, following out the programme she had



arranged for herself she came close to him and tried to soothe him by her caresses.

"Poor boy!" she said, stroking his hair. "Don't take it so much to heart. I shouldn't have told you, only it's ridiculous to stick to her from the false idea that she's faithful! She's never cared for you—every one knows that! Every one knows that she and Maryx have been——"

"Silence!" he shouted furiously shaking her off. His face was darkly flushed and he glared at her as though she, not Clare, were the culprit.

It was not at all the result she had expected.

"Why do you look at me like that?" she asked. "It's not my fault if your wife's——"

"By God, do you want me to kill you!" he shouted. Then he took his hat and gloves and went towards the door.

"Loutfi, where are you going?" she asked disappointed.

"I'm going to tell my wife what you say and ask her if it's true!" he answered, still glaring at her. "And if it isn't"—he paused menacingly—"if it isn't—*gare à vous!*"

"And if it is?" she called out, as he opened the door.

"And if it is—then—by God—I will divorce her and marry you!"

And with another oath he swung out of the room, and she heard him bang the door of the apartment with a force that shook the Palazzo, solid though it was.



CHAPTER X

DURING the quarter of an hour's drive to the villa Loutfi was a prey to the most conflicting emotions. At first he raged like a tiger, almost foaming at the mouth in his jealous fury. Then a reaction set in and his wrath turned on Elena. It was a lie—his reason told him—a base lie, a plot to make him divorce his wife and marry her, now that he was rich—scheming devil that she was.

Then the icy blast of the tramontana, whistling through the open window of the limousine, as it turned up the hill from the Porta delle Cure cooled his hot blood and he began to view things less savagely. Of course it was a lie! Clare was cold to a fault, and she was honour itself. Besides, he said to himself fatuously, she adored him! She would die rather than deceive him.

His passion for her returned with the dread of losing her, and he told himself complacently that he had neglected her, and promised himself

to be kinder. He would tell her of Elena's accusation, read her innocence in her eyes, and then he would take her in his arms and seal his forgiveness (for what she had not done) with a kiss. It was quite a long time since he had kissed her! Poor Clare!

Then he remembered with a renewed stab of jealousy how the day of his return he had begged her—he, who had the right to command—to give Ferdinand up, and how peremptorily she had refused—she, whose duty it was to obey! All the old Koranic teaching of his childhood came back to his mind in self-justification. Man is the only being that really counts in the world! Women were created merely to minister to his needs, like his horses and dogs. He felt *dépaysé* in a country where, if your wife deceives you, you may not have her sewn in a sack with a cat and a serpent and thrown into the sea, as the wise old Turks did. Curse these European women with their independence, and their imbeciles of husbands who encourage it! For a moment he regretted the unknown girl his mother had wanted him to marry. At least she would have been submissive and obedient, and folded her hands meekly over her breast, and answered to his orders—"It shall be as my master wishes!" Never had he so



appreciated Islam, never so detested Christianity—which, from the masculine standpoint, has done more harm in emancipating women than all the other revolutionary upheavals put together.

The automobile had arrived at the door of the villa, and he sprang out, eager to pour out his story into his wife's ears and receive her denial. That she would deny it he had no doubt, and though he realized that such an accusation, coming from Elena, would be a proof of his liaison with her, such a trifle weighed nothing with his desire to vent his rage. That he had a mistress was understood, but that she had a lover—Aman! Like Cæsar's, his wife must be above the suspicion of such an abomination.

She had told him that morning that she was not going beyond the garden, as she had the proofs of her book to correct and return. Besides the wind was piercing, and she hardly ever went out in the tramontana. So he walked quickly to her study without asking if she were in, feeling sure of finding her over her books as usual.

But when he burst in, truculent as a cock preparing to correct the hens in its poultry-yard, the study was empty. Her papers were scattered on her writing-table as though she had been called suddenly away, and he rang the bell violently

and asked the footman where she was. The man told him that the Principessa had driven out in the pony-cart almost directly after his departure.

"Driven out in the pony-cart!" he exclaimed angrily. "Did she say where she was going?"

No, her Excellency had not told him where she was going, but she had ordered the cart directly after receiving a telegram, and he had overheard her telling her maid that she was going to Castel di Poggio.

The atrocious fact coming on the top of Elena's accusation, almost suffocated him with rage, and it was all he could do to control himself before the footman. His jealousy returned with renewed violence. *It was true then!* And the scoundrel actually had the impudence to telegraph for her to go to him when he wanted her! Probably she went like that every day directly his back was turned! He was dying to question the man, who stood impassively waiting for orders; but he managed to control himself, and swinging round with an oath, told him angrily to leave the room.

The footman obeyed without surprise. The servants at the Schifanoia were used to his high-handed ways, especially since his return from Cairo, but they put up with them, because he was



generous and scattered his money right and left.

When he was alone he flung himself into a chair, half mad with fury, wondering how he could revenge himself on her and her lover. To wait till she came back was out of the question. He would go raving mad! Suddenly it came into his head what he had to do. He would follow her and surprise them, and if they looked guilty—if the least sign of guilt pointed to the truth of Elena's accusation—then—well then he would horsewhip the scoundrel within an inch of his life! The thought relieved him somewhat, and he sprang up and rang the bell violently, keeping his finger on the button till the man reappeared hastily.

"Tell the chauffeur that I want the automobile immediately, and send Henri to me," he ordered savagely.

When his valet came he told him to go to his room and bring him his riding-whip—the one with the gold handle.

"Will his Excellency need also his riding clothes?" the man asked surprised, for Loutfi had not ridden since his return.

"No, idiot—the whip only—and some thicker gloves than these—the buff chamois."

He put on the gloves, which were strong and easy-fitting, and took the whip. It was thin and supple as a reed and had a heavy gold handle. Then he flung himself again into the corner of the limousine and ordered the chauffeur to drive at his highest speed to Castel di Poggio.

The high-road to the castle was steep and winding, and it seemed to his excited fancy hours before they reached the cutting in the rock, at the end of which was the heavy iron cancello. He bade the footman not to enter but to ring and ask the porter if the Princess were there, himself drawing down the blinds so that he should not be seen. The old porter opened the side gate in answer to the ring, and listening intently he could hear him with true Italian loquacity reply—No, the Principessa was not there—she had left about ten minutes ago with the Signore. She had sent the pony-cart home and was walking back by the bridal-path with the Signore.

He felt as though he would go mad. There was no longer any doubt of her guilt possible to his excited brain. Elena was right! Ferdinand was her lover and he—what was he! The frivolous French name for such contemptible creatures as outraged husbands rose to his lips, and instinctively he put his hand to his forehead.



He—Loutfi Sabaheddine—who had been the first to mock at husbands whose heads were decorated—he himself—God! It was maddening—monstrous! Elena had told him that every one in Florence knew it—probably every one in Paris too! Maryx had been her lover all along, and they had mocked him behind his back and turned him into ridicule for his blindness!

His blood was boiling in his veins and the only clear thought in his mind was that at all costs—somehow—at once—he must revenge himself! Otherwise he felt he would go mad!

The footman came to the window for orders. Like lightning it flashed into his brain what he had to do and how it was to be done. His voice was husky with suppressed passion as he bade him direct the chauffeur to a certain spot where the bridle-path to Fiesole crosses the high-road. There they must pass—she and her lover—in order to reach the villa. If only he were not too late!

The limousine turned with difficulty between the rugged fern-covered rocks on either side of the entrance, but once round, it tore swiftly down the hill towards the spot he had indicated. He clutched his whip in his gloved hand, a little relieved by the mad speed.

"So that was the secret of her coldness!" he muttered between his teeth, as he lay back in the corner of the carriage. "I might have known that no human being could be so passionless. Hypocritical English devil!—pretending to care for nothing but pictures and statues—using them as a blind for her adultery with that scoundrel!"

The limousine whirled at full speed round the sharp curves of the mountain, dashing the loose stones right and left, and leaving a cloud of dust in its wake. The throb of the engine mingled with the shriek of the tramontana, which was so piercing that it forced itself on his notice even in his madness. What could it be but love, he raged, that drove her out in such a wind—she who hated wind! And in a short time it would be dark, and she was out with that infernal hound alone!

The limousine stopped suddenly with a jerk that threw him violently against the side, and he looked out. They had arrived at the place he had indicated, and a donkey, heavily laden with green Faenza pottery, was pacing daintily across the road from the bridle-path, followed by an old bent man. The chauffeur had put on his brakes just in time to avoid them, but both donkey and



old man seemed indifferent to the risk they had run, and pursued their way serenely down the opposite path.

Loutfi got out and told the chauffeur to drive home, saying that he intended to walk back, and as soon as the limousine was out of sight, he looked about for some hiding place. A few steps up the road, commanding a view of the bridle-path, was a thick grove of cypresses, surrounding one of those classic-looking wayside chapels so common in Tuscany. He went to it and hid himself behind one of the thick trunks, clutching his riding-whip convulsively, and glaring down the path by which they must come. If only they had not already passed!

It was four o'clock and already the light was beginning to fail. The wind whistled through the thick foliage of the cypresses stinging his face and lashing his blood to frenzy. He wrapped his fur coat more closely round him and waited—mad with the enforced inaction.

Presently he heard the sound of far-off voices, and a moment later in the dusk, he saw them appear at the end of the path between the bushes of myrtle and juniper. They were engaged in an animated discussion, and as they approached Ferdinand unfolded a large roll he was carrying

and they paused and stood examining it, apparently debating some point of interest.

Even in that moment of supreme madness his reason told him that this was not the attitude of lovers—that all Clare had said was true—that she went to him only to discuss questions of art, and that their interview to-day was about the Mantegna portrait she thought of buying. But even while he realized it his hatred for Maryx increased fourfold, and he loathed him all the more for their mutual interests he could not share. His muscles stiffened involuntarily and he waited in his lair like a panther ready to spring.

They stood talking and looking at the photograph for fully two minutes. To Loutfi, forced to self-control, suffering the worst torture of his life, it seemed two hours! Then Ferdinand rolled it up, and they strolled quietly on towards him, still talking with animation. He waited till they had emerged on the high-road and then strode suddenly forward, and before they had time even to see who it was, he had raised the whip high over his head and struck Ferdinand a stinging blow across the cheek.

Then before either of them had recovered from their astonishment at the unexpected



attack, he swung the whip round in his hand and struck another blow, this time with the heavy gold handle. With a cry of pain Ferdinand put up his hand to his face which was streaming with blood, and Clare darted forward to seize his assailant, whom in the dusk she had not recognized for her husband. With an oath he stood glaring at her for one brief second, long enough for her to see with a thrill of horror who it was, then he broke the slight bamboo across his knee, hurled the pieces at her feet, and was gone.

CHAPTER XI

IT was June in Paris, a year and four months after the events above related. The season was in full swing, and the trees in the Avenue du Bois had put on their greenest garments. They had to make the most of their short life, for in less than a month their leaves would begin to shrivel and wither under the poisonous exhalations of benzol and tar, and by the end of July most of them would have already fluttered to the ground. But to-night, unaware of the transience of their glory, they were dancing in the breeze as merrily as if they came out of a poem by Wordsworth, and their green took the lustre of stage foliage in the light of a thousand electric lamps.

Before the gilded railings of a sumptuous hotel, set well back from the road, and shaded by its own grove of flowering trees, a long line of automobiles was stationed. The chauffeurs in their sombre, braided tunics were discussing, cigarette in mouth, the chances of the Grand



Prix, catching up and whistling now and again the strains of Lehar's latest valse, which was borne on the breeze from the ballroom on the other side of the house. The night was hot—almost sultry—and in the garden within several of the guests were strolling down the great flight of marble steps covered with red velvet, between two rows of silk-stockinged footmen in gorgeous liveries of black and gold, to cool themselves in the fresh air between the dances.

It was the hotel of Prince Loutfi Sabaheddine, the wealthy Egyptian, and his Italian wife, Elena, of the noble Florentine family of the Marchesi Davanti delle Spade, the favourite rendezvous of all that was distinguished, chic, and amusing, in the French capital. They were giving the last of a series of magnificent entertainments—Persian fêtes, Russian ballets, Spanish dances, and Lucullus banquets, and all the other exotic amusements which have become essential to modern society. To-night Gaby Deslys and her danseur had come on from the Marigny to perform her celebrated *Glide* to an audience mad with enthusiasm, and had departed at two o'clock, leaving behind her a mob of would-be imitators, who now began to pour out into the garden to cool their dripping brows.

By the side of a marble basin, in the centre of which a bronze merman and mermaid amorously entwined, spouted jets of water from their conchs, two men were seated, each with a half-consumed cigar between his fingers. One was Robert Chetwynd, dainty poet though he had written no poetry; the other, the Marchese Montorsoli. Guido Montorsoli had just returned from a long tour in Japan and China, which he had undertaken as a restorative to spirits sadly shaken by the final rejection of his adored Elena, whom he had known and loved since they were both children together. The news of her marriage with the young Egyptian, whose divorce from his English wife had been pronounced in the spring of the preceding year, had reached him in Tokio, where he was vainly trying to heal his wounds in the arms of a little Mousmé, whose dark eyes resembled those of his lost mistress. Poor boy! He must have been born under an unlucky star, for the very week after the wedding his uncle had died, and he had inherited a fortune so considerable that, had it come earlier, it might have satisfied even her cupidity. His sojourn in the extreme East had not cured him of his love, for Elena seemed to him a part of his very existence, and during his homeward journey he had checked



off each mile as bringing him nearer to her. Perhaps he counted on her fulfilment of the promise she had made him under the Schifanoia ilex. If so he was woefully disillusioned.

He had arrived in Paris the day before, and had hardly waited to make his toilet before he found himself at the door of her hotel, with a heart beating so fast that it seemed to him the footman must surely hear it. He had been shown into the vast salon glittering with gold and mirrors, and had waited there for fully half an hour, during which his nerves were so wrought up with alternations of hope and despair that he feared he should faint. And then—then—his Beloved had come into the room and greeted him in sisterly fashion as though they had parted yesterday, had paused in the middle of her welcome to give an order to the footman, and had told him she could only give him a quarter of an hour because she was due at her dressmaker. And after the quarter of an hour was over, and he got up to go with the tears in his eyes, she had dismissed him kindly but with no trace of her former affection, and had invited him to come to her ball.

Poor little Guido! He had gone back to his hotel and thrown himself on the bed in a paroxysm

of grief, and had had to stuff the sheet into his mouth to prevent his sobs being heard. A moment of healthy rage against her had followed, during which he swore by all the gods that he would never see her face again, that he would die rather than go to her ball; and the next day he had dressed himself with the utmost care, had sent for the best coiffeur and manicure in Paris, had perfumed himself with her favourite scent—and had gone.

Elena, surrounded by royal admirers, had not given him even one dance, and he had left the ballroom in company with Chetwynd, who was bored with the glare and noise, and taken his seat by the fountain with a feeling like death in his soul.

"The marriage seems to be a success," Chetwynd was saying, unaware of the wounds he was inflicting. "Certainly she must suit Sebaheddine better than Clare Glynne. How he ever came to marry her, or rather, how she ever came to marry him, I could never understand! It would be impossible to find two people more unsuited. At least one must own that he and Elena are well matched."

"It seems so, certainly," the boy said with a sigh. "The Prince is very rich, isn't he?"



"Yes, he's got enough even to satisfy her, I fancy. They have had a tremendous success here. They entertain enormously and all Paris clamours for an invitation to their parties. To-night, as you saw, there are five Royalties, and every one of any note at all is here. Every one goes to them except a few old-fashioned Faubourg people who hate strangers on principle and wealth because they haven't got any."

"She's more beautiful than ever too!" murmured the boy, who had been dazzled by Elena's ultra-Parisian chic.

"Yes, Paris has the knack of polishing people up," replied Chetwynd. "It's all a question of toilette. She has the best artists in Paris to dress and coiffer her. They say Poiret and Parry fought a duel for her custom. By the way, isn't that Sibyl Antonini coming down the steps?"

Guido turned. "Yes," he replied; "I didn't expect to see her here. I thought she was Miss Glynne's oldest friend?"

"So she is, but Sibyl's of the world, and nobody can afford not to know the Sabaheddines. Elena's the rage this year, you know! Bon soir, Princesse!" he said, rising and throwing away his cigar with old-fashioned politeness as she came towards them, strolling across the grass with her

cavaliers, who happened to be Jules Sandeau, the poet, and Porphirio Gomez, the painter, whose portrait of her as Salome in the Salon had been the artistic event of the year.

"Bon soir, Chetwynd! Glad to see you! Bon soir, Marchese! I didn't know you were back!" Sibyl called out in her gay, ringing voice. "The last I heard of you was that you were going to marry the daughter of a Mandarin with seven tails! Have you just come from Florence?"

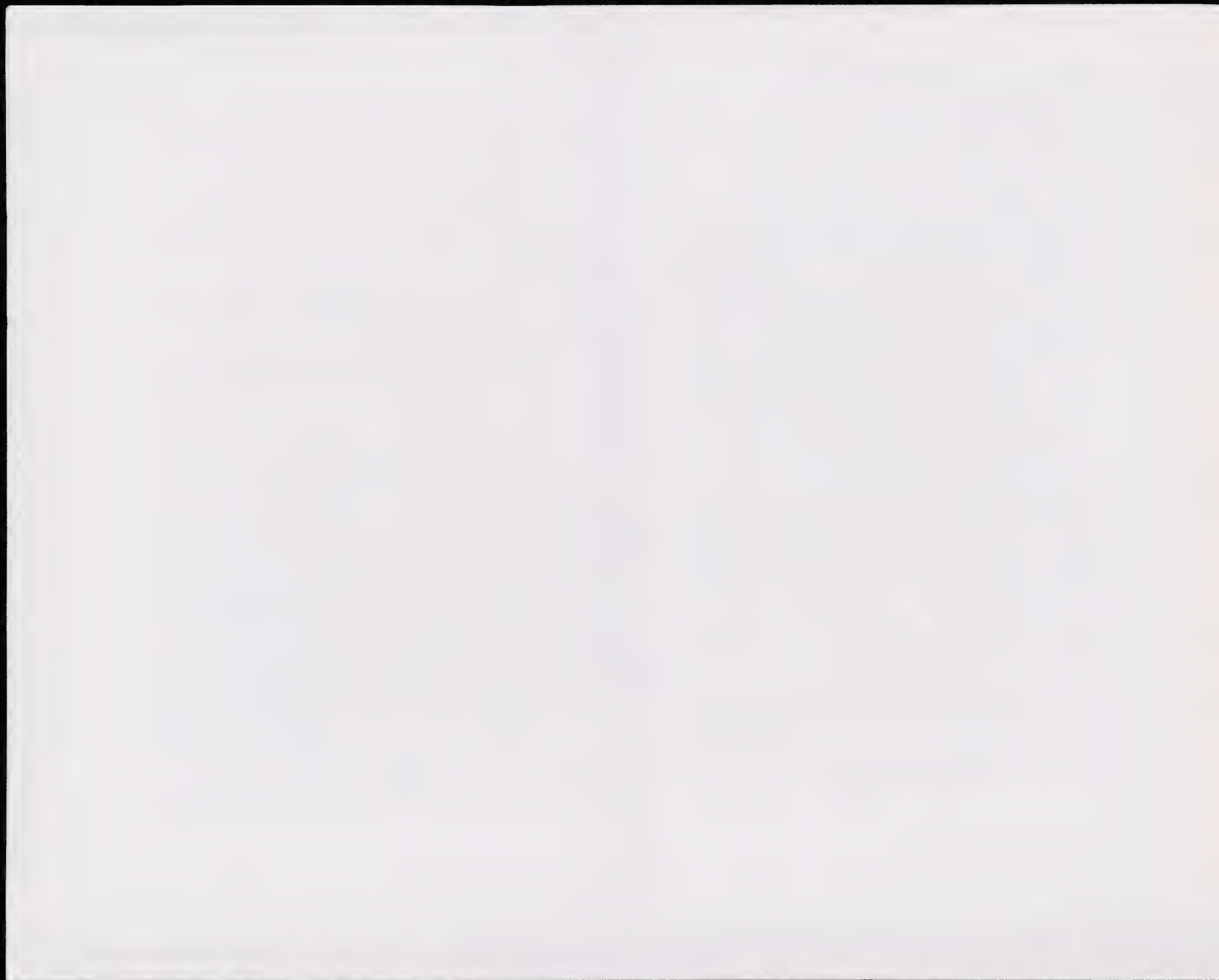
"No," Guido replied; "I'm on my way there."

"Will you see Clare? Give her my love if you do. It's months since we met, but she's too busy for Paris frivolities now she's become a literary star. You've heard of her enormous success with her book, I suppose?"

"No," said Guido. "I only arrived yesterday and I've hardly seen a paper since I've been away."

"Oh, it's tremendous!" Sibyl went on. "She's taken the world by storm, hasn't she, Chetwynd?"

"Yes," he replied seriously; "I always knew that Clare Glynne had talent, but that she had genius, as her book proves, I think no one



suspected before. It's a superb bit of literature, worthy of Flaubert himself."

"In America it's already in the tenth edition," Sibyl went on. "Mamma says every one's mad about it in New York and Boston. It's been translated into every civilized language, and even here in critical Paris it's in all the shop windows."

"What's it about?" asked Gomez. "She used only to write about art things, I thought."

"She's taken a wider field now," said Chetwynd. "It's a study of character under a veil of romance, something in the style of *Madame Bovary*."

"And is it really very clever?" asked Sandeau. "My publisher sent it to me the other day among a lot of other books, but I've not yet had time to read it."

"It's marvellous from the literary point of view, and exceedingly fine from the psychological. They say the suffragette movement will profit by it more than all their window-breaking and stone-throwing. Without the least touching on her married life (from which, however, she must have got her intimate knowledge of men), she defends the cause of Woman versus Man with such force and ability, with such impartiality and

comprehension, and above all with such delicate tact, that even the men themselves have had to applaud."

"And what is better," interrupted Sibyl, "they say she's made already twenty thousand pounds by the English and American editions only, and will make as much again in another year!"

"It's always like that!" said Sandeau, a little enviously, for with all his success he had never made a quarter of such a sum. "If she had been poor she probably wouldn't have gained a penny!"

"Ah, well!" said Chetwynd, "I don't know about that. The book has real grit in it. It was bound to succeed sooner or later."

"So she's left off writing on art subjects!" Sandeau inquired.

"She says not," Chetwynd replied. "I saw her in Florence the other day, and she told me the book was only an interlude in her real literary work. But we shall see! *L'appetito viene mangiando!*"

"What the devil does she do with all that money," asked Sandeau, who could think of nothing else. "Does she still go on living in Florence?"



"Yes, she's still at the Schifanoia, and she's built an enormous gallery there. She travels a great deal and spends most of her money on pictures and statues. Bardini told me her collection bids fair to rival that of the late Madame Edouard André."

"I suppose she was frightfully upset at her husband's marriage?" inquired Gomez, lighting a cigarette.

"Not at all! She behaved magnificently. You remember the scandal, when Sabaheddine waylaid her and Maryx in the mountains, and half blinded the poor fellow with his whip?"

"Yes, I heard about it of course! All Paris was talking of it. But I didn't know who was in the right, he or she. Every one here believed that he caught them *flagrante delicto*; but that was chiefly because Sabaheddine came straight here and talked the Clubs over. I never heard the details of the story, for I was too busy with my picture to go out much. He left the man with one eye crevé, didn't he—without giving him a chance to defend himself?"

"Yes," Chetwynd replied. "He sent him a challenge afterwards though, only poor Maryx was too ill to accept it. Poor fellow! He nearly lost the sight of his eye. Such beautiful eyes

they were too—like onyx! Sabaheddine's like a madman when he's jealous—doesn't the least know what he's doing. It seems some scandal-monger had told him his wife was faithless, and he had sworn it wasn't true, and caught her the very same day in the woods with Maryx. He saw red and struck him with all his force with a loaded whip."

"He's a savage!" ejaculated Sibyl, disgusted, "an absolute savage! I know all about it—there was nothing in it whatever. Maryx was one of her oldest friends—had known her as a child and used to help her with her studies, and that day she had gone to consult him about a portrait by Mantegna she had set her heart on buying. They had wired to her that some one else was after it and she must decide at once. Loutfi caught them walking together to the Fiesole Telegraph Office, if that's what you call *flagrante delicto*, Gomez!"

"And what happened after the blow?" inquired Sandeau. "Maryx nearly died in the road, didn't he?"

"Yes, poor fellow!" answered Chetwynd. "He was taken by surprise, you see, and it was too dark even to see who it was. He's a wiry little man and brave as a lion, but Sabaheddine



was gone before he recovered his senses, and he was blinded with blood and mad with pain. He had been struck full in the eyeball and had to lie in a darkened room for months. They thought at first he would be totally blind."

"Poor Miss Glynne!" said Guido, sympathetically. "What an awful moment for her! What did she do?"

"Well, luckily for her a cart passed almost directly after, and she had him taken home. He was in agony for weeks, and she stayed with his wife and helped to nurse him. She refused to have anything to say to her husband, and gave her London lawyer orders to arrange at once for a divorce. It was easy enough, for already Vansittart had filed a petition against his wife, with Sabaheddine as one of the co-respondents—you remember that Cairo affair just after his mother died? Sabaheddine offered no opposition—he couldn't of course—and when it was all settled Clare went back to her villa and resumed her maiden name. A month afterwards he wrote to beg her to remarry him! Impulsive fellows these Orientals! He said he was miserable without her and implored her to forgive him. She wrote him back a splendid letter, it seems, but naturally she refused to put her head in the

noose again! Sabaheddine told me himself one day, almost with tears in his eyes, that he had never been happy since he lost her. He said she was the most splendid creature he had ever known, and that he had been a fool not to find out her worth earlier."

"They say here that it was all his present wife's doing from beginning to end," said Gomez. "It seems she plotted the whole thing when he came into his mother's money, and carried it through without a flaw. The only thing I can't understand is why he married her so soon if he still cared for his first wife as you say."

"Oh, that's easily accounted for with a character like his," replied Chetwynd. "He was wretched at Clare's refusal and Elena petted him and consoled him. She's the sort of woman who turns everything to profit when she's got a scheme in her head."

Guido sat by in silence with bent head. He had been so disillusioned that he had not the heart to defend his broken idol.

"Princess Elena's a clever devil, any one can see that," remarked Gomez. "But I think Sabaheddine is a match for her. My own opinion is that he's only waiting his opportunity to get rid of her. She does outrageous things under



his very nose and he pays no attention. Did you see her to-night with the Grand Duke? He never left her side for one moment and she was flirting with him abominably. It's not normal for an Oriental to let his wife flirt like that! One would say he encouraged her. Indeed, Djavid Pasha told me as much. He said he was only waiting a good opportunity to divorce her. He won't have to wait long if she goes on as she did to-night!"

"Well, she's certain to fall on her feet anyway," remarked Sibyl, rising. "As Gomez says, her intelligence is so remarkable that one has to admire her. She married her brother magnificently in spite of his debts, and if Loutfi divorces her she's only got to choose among half a dozen other Princes—one of them a reigning one. Believe me she's far too clever to play into his hands like that unless she had something better in prospect. Come, Gomez, let's go back and dance another tango. They are playing the air I can never resist."

They all went back to the ballroom except Guido, who walked back to his hotel with a heart like lead.

* * * * *

That same night, or rather morning, when

the last automobile had throbbed away, Loutfi and Elena, tired with their social duties, were lounging in the small salon adjoining the ballroom smoking a final cigarette before going to bed. Even at the end of the long evening she was looking as fresh and brilliant as when she had first made her appearance. Her eyes were flashing, her dark hair was shining, her olive skin was slightly flushed, her lips were as red as a pomegranate. She was exquisite in her clinging robes, in the nebulous folds of which the gems and embroideries glinted like dew-drops in the petals of a rose. She was radiantly beautiful and radiantly happy, for she had fought hard with life and had conquered gloriously. She had everything that she wanted, and it mattered little to her that her husband had fits of depression hitherto unknown to him, and that his passion for her was entirely dead. At times it irritated her—that was all.

Now as he lay back in his chair smoking, with a glass of whisky and soda beside him, he seemed so dejected, so thoroughly miserable, that she, triumphant with the brilliant success of her ball, was enervated by it, and turned to him sharply.

"What's the matter, Loutfi, that you look



so suicidal? You are a real Death's head at the feast. Such a splendid success we had! All the royalties in Paris here, and they all stayed to the end! The Infante swore she had never been so well amused in her life!"

He made no answer, only emptied his glass at a draught and rang the bell for more.

"Look here!" she went on in her strident voice, rising and going towards the mirror. "You drink too much of that mess, Loutfi! I never see you now without a glass by your side. You'll have a horrible headache to-morrow and be in one of your impossible moods."

Still no answer. The tired footman brought the bottles, mixed the drink, and was retiring with them. Loutfi called him back.

"Leave the whisky here and bring another Schweppe," he ordered. "You can go to bed."

Elena was standing in front of the Venice mirror admiring herself and watching the flash of the superb diamonds she wore on her neck and in her hair. She turned to him with a yawn.

"Oh, well, if you mean to go on drinking till breakfast I'll say good-night," she said. Then, as she caught sight of his white face which used to be so fresh, a rare moment of remorse came over her and she leaned over his chair and

touched his hair caressingly with her sapphire-laden fingers.

"What's the matter, cheri?" she asked, with something of her old manner. "Has anything happened to upset you?"

She thought perhaps it might be her own outrageous flirtation with the Grand Duke, and she was pleased, for it annoyed her sometimes that she had not, like Clare, the power to rouse his jealousy.

"Aman! Leave me!" he exclaimed roughly, shaking her hand off. "I'm not in the mood for caresses!"

"Aman! as you say. What a savage you are!" she retorted angrily, humiliated at the rebuff. "There's no pleasing you! You're always having fits of depression now—depression or irritability! I suppose it was the sight of that idiot Chetwynd that recalled your beloved Clare! I believe you are madly in love with her still, in spite of her hating you and caring only for Maryx!"

"Silence!" he said furiously, springing to his feet. "Leave my wife's name alone, do you hear?"

"Oh, la la! Your wife! That is really charming! If she is your wife, what am I, pray?"



He made no answer, and with an angry gesture she left the room, banging the door behind her with energy.

Left to himself, Loutfi threw himself again into his chair, and his head sank lower and lower on his chest. Presently he roused himself, mixed and drank another glass of whisky and soda, while his face grew more and more gloomy.

"Fool! Imbecile!" he muttered, after a while. "She may well ask what's the matter! Myself I hardly know! Only I feel that I would give the world to have that woman by my side again—coldness, statues, pictures, and all—to hear her read her old love poems that had nothing to do with love—anything to have her once more in my life——"

Then he got up, shook himself, and went to his own rooms. But instead of undressing he went to his bureau, opened a secret drawer, and took out a letter, worn with much reading. He opened it, turned the sheet to the last page, and lingered long over the final words. It was the letter written by Clare a month after her divorce, in answer to his prayer that she would take him again as her husband.

"I have nothing to forgive!" it ran. "We made a mistake, but the fault was mine more

than yours, for I knew the depth of the gulf between us. We shall never meet again on the old ground. That would be only to fall again into the quicksands that so nearly destroyed us. If I did as you ask and became again your wife, the result would be the same as before. For marriage our temperaments are too different, but some day we shall meet as friends on a surer footing. When that day arrives—when you need me and call me to you as a comrade—then the gulf will be spanned, and I will come to you. Then we—the real you and the real me—shall meet for the first time. Only, remember—the bridge will be for ever too immaterial to support the weight of our bodies."

He put the letter back in the drawer almost reverently, and took out a book bound in green, with his own initials stamped in gold on the cover. He opened the fly-leaf and kissed the written inscription. It was—

"In Memory and Hope—Clare."



